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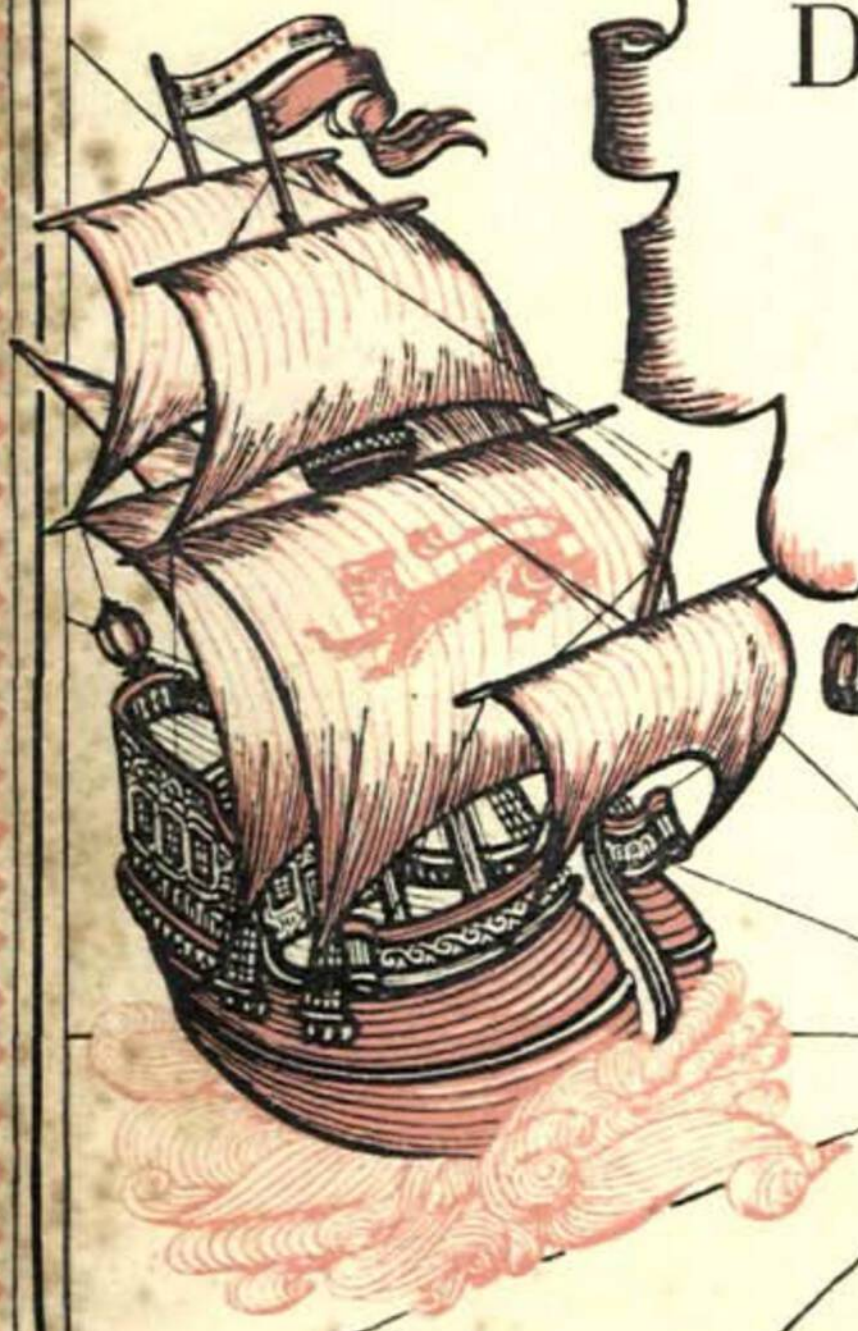
ARGOSY



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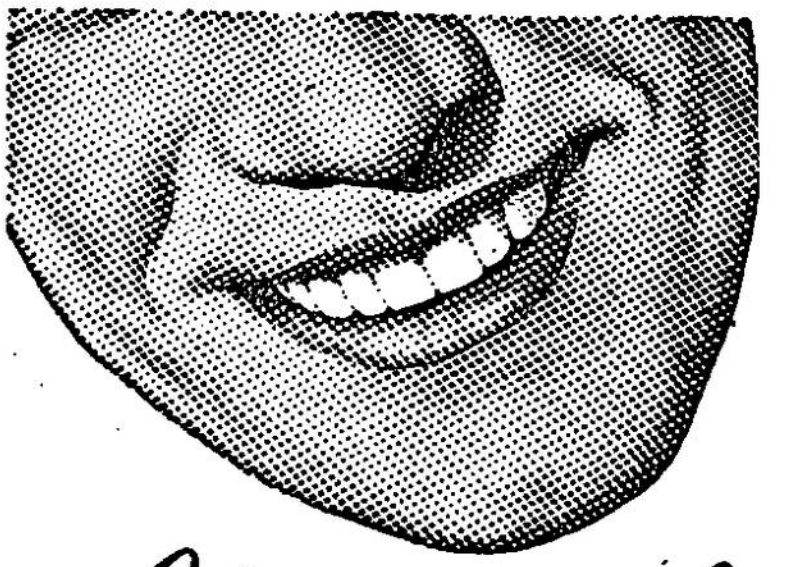

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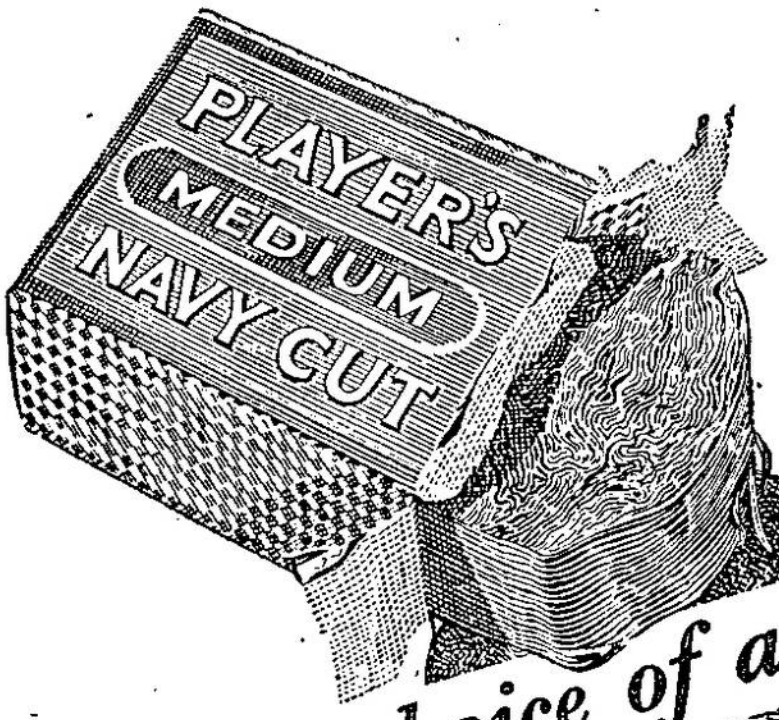

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ARGOSY

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Gloria

WHEN Crist was born of Mary free
In Bedlem in that faire cité,
Angelles sang ever with mirth and glee
In excelsis gloria.

Herdmen beheld thes angelles bright
To hem apperèd with gret light,
And seid 'Goddes sone is born this night'.
In excelsis gloria.

This king is comen to save kinde,
In the scriptur as we finde;
Therefore this song have we in minde,
In excelsis gloria.

Then, Lord, for thy gret grace,
Graunt us the bliss to see thy face,
Where we may sing to thy solas
In excelsis gloria.

AUTHOR UNKNOWN, 1456

THE LADY AND THE CUT-THROAT

There are some services for which money cannot pay

by TOM HOPKINSON

IN days long ago there lived in a certain town in Sicily a young and beautiful woman. She was wealthy, and dwelt alone in her villa with her maids; but being of a virtuous and charitable disposition she was loved throughout the district, so that nobody ever troubled her or did her harm. It happened one day, however, that a messenger arrived at the lady's house bringing a letter from a remote part of the country. The letter contained strange news. A childhood friend of the lady's was lying grievously ill among strangers. Her husband had died, and she knew no one but the lady of our story to appeal to: she begged her to set aside all other duties and come immediately to her aid. She had, she said, spent almost her last coin to pay the messenger.

When the lady had read the letter and rewarded its carrier, she went at once to the Temple to consult the Goddess. "How," she asked, "am I to make a journey across country in these times of war and confusion without being destroyed or, what is far worse, being violated by some evil-doer?"

"Child," answered the Goddess, "it is my intention that you should make this journey, and if you do as I say, no harm will come to you. You are to set out in four days' time, taking an ample sum of money, and choosing as companion the first man who offers himself to be your escort."

The lady was about to speak, but the Goddess laid a finger on her lips, so she bowed low and silently withdrew.

Next morning, when she had scarcely risen, her maid brought word that a strange man wished to speak with the lady of the house. "Bring him before me," said the lady, and a truly extraordinary being was shown into her room.

He was only of medium height, but, from his lithe and cat-like movements, gave the impression of being much taller than he was. He was dressed in a handsome but tarnished suit of black and orange, and against the extreme darkness of his skin his eyes flashed like the windows of a house that catch the sun. Long moustaches curled

up almost to touch his small gold ear-rings, and by his side hung a long curved knife : as though this might prove insufficient for his purposes, he carried two daggers in a sash about his waist.

Bowing low, he advanced across the room. He had the springy gait of a juggler or tumbler, but his voice when he spoke was smooth and confident. " I have heard, madam, that you intend to undertake a journey to the far side of our island. For that you will certainly require an escort. I have come to offer my services."

The lady, shocked and uneasy at the prospect of travelling in such company, faltered, " I am indeed planning a journey. But the question of my escort is as yet uncertain. It may be that certain of my friends will travel with me. Be so good as to leave word with my maid where you are to be found, and I shall approach you later if I should require your services."

" My instructions," declared the cut-throat, " are to escort you to your destination. There is no need to waste time in distrust."

" I am the best judge of my own requirements," the lady answered proudly. " Make clear where I can find you, and be so good as to leave my presence."

The stranger gave his name as Carlo, said that he could be found at *The Sign of the Broken Crossbow* near the western gate, and left the villa in such a storm of rage that he forgot even to pinch the plump serving-maid who showed him to the door.

Immediately he had gone, the lady hurried to the Temple in a state of extreme agitation. After she had been kneeling for some hour or so in prayer, the Goddess stood before her.

" Blessed One," began the lady, " a grievous mistake has occurred. The man who called at my house this morning was no gentle and honourable knight, but a ferocious cut-throat. I could not journey a mile with comfort in his company."

The brow of the Goddess went dark and her long silver garment shook like the leaves of a poplar tree in a shower.

" Child," she said sternly, " the error is your own pride, and you will be fortunate if you do not pay the price. What good would it be to send you out into the world escorted by a chivalrous and gentle knight ? Two innocents together ! Every knight may meet one stronger than himself, or be outnumbered. His very appearance is a challenge, and even a child is able to outwit him, for everyone knows exactly how an honourable knight will act. If I have chosen for you a man of a different sort, I have chosen him with reason. Do you act prudently yet trustfully with regard to him, and leave him to act on behalf of you both towards the world.

" Furthermore," the Goddess added, laying her hand on the lady's golden curls, " let me not be told a second time that my instructions have proved to be ' mistakes '."

That same evening the lady sent a messenger to *The Sign of the Broken Crossbow*, and next morning Carlo appeared.

"Choose the horses we require from the stable," the lady told him, "and make all necessary arrangements with my servants. We shall start tomorrow at midday."

"Not so, madam," answered the cut-throat. "We shall start the following morning while it is still dark. There are many evilly-disposed persons who will quickly send word of your journey to their confederates outside, if we are seen leaving the town—and we shall find enemies enough from the hazards of the road. I shall choose the three strongest horses in your stable. Do you put what you need into panniers that will go on the back of one. Furnish also a leather purse containing a hundred gold crowns. Twenty of these will be my payment when we reach your friend. Anything I may spend on my own account upon the way"—and his eye flashed unaccountably—"will be deducted from the twenty owing to me on our arrival. Meantime I consider myself already in your service, and shall take up my abode in your house to ensure that everything is ready in two days' time."

Next morning, the last she would spend in her own home, the lady rose early, as her custom was, and walked through her gardens towards the private shrine where she was used to pray.

In the mists of dawn a strange sight met her eyes. There, on a lawn away from the villa, was her escort. Now he leaped and bounded into the air. Now he caught hold of the bough of a tree and swung himself from it by one hand. Suddenly, having turned a number of somersaults, he dropped face forward, and walked to and fro in the grass upon his hands. Then, drawing his long knife, he made it whistle through the air, swirling it to and fro about his head as if fighting a hundred enemies at the same time. Finally he tossed it spinning to the tree-tops and, catching it deftly by the handle as it fell, thrust it back once more into its sheath.

"So," said the lady to herself, "I see that for a man to be a cut-throat something more is needed than a willingness to take life," and she went on to the shrine to perform her worship.

For several days the lady and the cut-throat pursued their way without mischance. At times her escort would appear unreasonable, stopping at a place when the lady would have gone on, or pressing still farther when she preferred to halt. However, she remembered the words of the Goddess, and obeyed all his instructions.

From time to time on the way they would engage in argument. "Madam," said Carlo, "the way is long, and I believe in learning what I can from my companions. It is plain that you, in spite of your beauty, are a lady of a discreet and virtuous life. Do you, as we

journey on, tell me of the pleasures you find in living virtuously, and I on my side will inform you concerning my own experience."

"Are you not afraid," the lady asked, "that I may be disturbed by the tales you have to tell me, seeing that I am, as you say, of a virtuous and modest life?"

"Not so," answered the cut-throat, "for as a lady of wide reading you must be familiar with stories of much greater wickedness than any I shall recount. Do you but regard my talk as written in books, and you will find no necessity for blushing."

Discoursing in this way they journeyed on until on the fifth day, as they were passing through a narrow gorge, four ragged men with swords rushed out and would have stopped them. Carlo, however, did not wait to hear their arguments. Snatching out his long knife and clapping spurs into his horse, he flew at the men, and killed the foremost with a single stroke. Not satisfied with this, he pursued the other three with the greatest ferocity and would have continued the chase had they not, knowing every goat's track among the rocks, speedily vanished where he could not follow.

On his return the lady remonstrated with him: "I perceive you are a man of courage," she said, "and I am grateful for your protection. But why, having killed one man, must you pursue the rest? I believe, if the rocks had not swallowed them up, you would have cut all four of these poor wretches into pieces."

"No madam," replied Carlo, wiping his knife carefully upon the dead man's rags, "I should have cut but three of them in pieces, leaving the fourth to spread the tidings. Such villains as these communicate with one another across all the land, and if word goes round that the solitary lady is escorted by a fiend, you are the less likely to be molested. Who knows," he added with a smile, "but that by my method there may be less killing in the end?"

Now it was the custom of the cut-throat to sleep each night outside the lady's door. Two nights later, when they had reached a little town and the lady was in bed, Carlo came into her room.

"Madam," he declared, "I have resolved to lie with you tonight. Make no protests, for I shall ignore them all."

"Begone out of my room at once, vile man," the lady ordered, rising in bed and looking sternly at him. The cut-throat reached for his small dagger.

"Now," said the lady, "I perceive that you are not only a cut-throat, but a fool. Have you journeyed a whole week in my company—and do you not realize I shall greatly prefer to die, rather than pretend love to a man for whom I do not feel it?"

The cut-throat stamped with rage. He drew five gold pieces from his bag and, throwing the rest down on the lady's bed, set off into the town to consume himself in a debauch.

Now, as it chanced, the keeper of the inn where they were staying was a villain. He had seen the fine horses of his visitors, noted the leather bag they carried with them, and was eager to secure all for himself. No sooner, therefore, had Carlo gone into the town, than he sent word to the captain of police.

"A woman spy and a murderer are staying at my inn. If you wish to obtain credit with the Governor of our province, send men to secure the woman while her escort is making merry in the town."

Next morning when Carlo returned, his lady was nowhere to be seen. He demanded of the innkeeper what had befallen her.

"I know nothing of any lady," the landlord answered stoutly. "You arrived at my inn last night, drunk as a pig. I was good enough to find room for you out of the kindness due to travellers. You chose to go carousing off into the town—and now come to ask me for some lady. Begone, before I send for the captain of police."

Silently, the cut-throat whipped out his long knife. It blazed over the innkeeper's head in a pattern of light. The innkeeper trembled as he felt the warm blood on his neck, for each of his ears had been nicked on either side.

"It is my long-thin friend," the cut-throat murmured in a voice as smooth as silk. "Some mornings he abandons my control. At the first flash he only bites the ears. The second, he slices them clean off. For the third he accepts nothing less than the whole head"—and, as the ruffians of the tavern surged forward, he whirled his long knife a hundred ways at once.

"Sometimes," he cried, "this greedy knife will devour a whole tavernful of ears at a single breakfast!" Then, as the men drew back, he laid the point tenderly against the landlord's throat.

"Where is my lady?"

"She was seized by the chief of police, wrongly supposing her to be a spy."

Carlo twisted one hand firmly into the innkeeper's hair, pressing the knife-point now against his back.

"We will visit this master of police together!" he declared.

The chief of police looked more than amazed when the innkeeper and Carlo stood before him.

"Noblest of officers," began Carlo, "I am grievously afraid that, through the stupidity of this rascal, you have endangered your own lofty position in the State."

"My position?" the officer demanded. "How can that be?"

"The orders upon which I act," Carlo declared, "are secret. It is not proper to speak of them before this pig. Thrust him into a cell, while I acquaint your honoured ears with the peril in which you have unwittingly placed yourself."

The chief of police had the innkeeper removed.

"Most powerful, and at the same time most gentlemanly, of high officials," Carlo announced, "I am an agent in the Service of the Governor of our province. He is, be it said with the profoundest respect, as lascivious as any he-goat. Having heard of the great beauty and chastity of the lady I am accompanying, nothing would content him but to make her the plaything of his princely pleasures. For that purpose I was sent to her with forged letters. The lady believes herself to be journeying to visit a sick friend. In truth she is travelling to His Excellency's bed—where, I need scarcely tell you, it is essential that she arrive in good condition."

The chief of police went white. "It is only by the direct mercy of God," he cried, "that I refrained from violating her myself this morning . . . But have you some document from the Governor to prove your story?"

Carlo drew from his pocket a large waxen seal, stolen long ago from an official order to find hay for horses.

"Lawyers carry papers," he said grimly. "We agents of the Governor bear nothing but his own private seal. However, if you should search the lady—though I must warn you it may well cost you your life—you would undoubtedly discover the forged letter instructing her to visit her sick friend."

"What am I to do?" the officer pleaded. "Already, through heeding the falsehoods of this rascal innkeeper, I may have given offence—however innocently—to those in power."

"All can yet be made good," Carlo reassured him. "Bring the lady to me at once. Had she a bag of gold crowns in her possession when your men arrested her?

"No," protested the officer. "I should assuredly have known it, if she had money of any sort."

"Then, by all the Gods and Goddesses," cried Carlo, "that blow-fly of an innkeeper has stolen them! And 'tis certain he intends to steal our horses too. Let two trusted men accompany me to the inn, otherwise even now he may practise some villainy on us which will prove fatal to your own prosperity."

When they had advanced some distance from the town, the cut-throat leaped down from his horse.

"I intend, madam, to walk the next ten miles upon my feet."

"Why so?" the lady asked. "Is this in penance for your offering to ill-use me?"

"By no means," replied Carlo with a look of boldness. "I did but offer what any man would offer. It is in penance for having broken my trust, leaving you defenceless at the inn."

"Then seeing you saved me at great hazard," the lady answered,

" I shall walk the ten miles by your side. But tell me, why did you rob the innkeeper ? Will your having treated him dishonestly render him an honest man ? "

" I did not *rob* him," answered Carlo. " 'Tis true I compelled him to restore the bag with a full hundred crowns, whereas we had already spent some fifteen on our way . . ."

" Five," murmured the lady, " were spent by you alone."

The cut-throat smiled. " It is necessary," he said, " to teach such men a lesson. Robbing a traveller till yesterday was accompanied in that landlord's mind by thoughts of gain. Now it is accompanied in his mind by fear of loss. When next some hopeful plot occurs to him, he may reconsider before embarking on it. In future, too, I fancy, that chief of police will hardly be his friend."

The travellers had now entered a district of high mountains, and it was sometimes difficult for them to reach the protection of a town before night fell. At last, as the way grew rougher, it happened that darkness closed on them before they could arrive at any shelter. Pressing on, they came at last to a great building by a Temple.

" This," said Carlo, " must be the home of priests or priestesses. I will go forward and compel them to undo the door."

However, when the grating in the gate was opened, a woman's face peered out for but a second, and the grating was immediately drawn to. Carlo hammered on the door and cursed in vain.

" Do you," said the lady, " withdraw some twenty paces, leaving me to speak to the good people within."

The cut-throat did as he was bid. Knocking lightly on the door, the lady called : " A moment's speech with you, friends—at the express order of the Goddess."

Immediately the grating was drawn back. " I am a traveller," the lady explained, " journeying by the Goddess's commands to relieve a dying soul. This man is my escort. We have been benighted, and seek shelter."

" Shelter for yourself we gladly offer," said the voice of the woman porter. " But your companion is a man of sin. Him we may not admit."

" If you do not admit my escort," said the lady, " I shall myself sleep outside, and the consequences will be on the heads of those who made it necessary." And she described a strange sign with her left hand in the air.

At once the gates were opened, and the travellers let in. Next day, as they journeyed on, the cut-throat spoke. " Teach me," he said, " that sign you made in the air. It may secure me shelter on my travels at some future time."

The lady smiled. " You," she said, " can cut a fly into two halves with your knife as it buzzes past. It has taken you twenty years to

acquire this skill, and if someone asked you to instruct him in five minutes, you would laugh."

"But," Carlo protested, "this was but a sign. You described it in the air with your left hand—so!"

"Do not try to make the sign," the lady said, "till you have passed as many years in prayer as you have in handling your knife. If we have any need of prayers or signs, I can provide them."

After a further two days' travel, they arrived at the town from which the letter had come: the friend who had written it was already dead. While the lady mourned, Carlo made arrangements for the burial, and for the return of the dead woman's belongings to her home. When all had been completed, they set out once more. This time they accomplished the journey without mishap, having long discourse by the way. Indeed they would sometimes remain at an inn the whole night talking, and forget to rest.

At last they stood once more in the lady's room at her own villa. Opening a desk, she took forty gold pieces from it.

"Receive the reward which you have amply earned," she said. "And consider me from this time as your friend."

But the cut-throat shook his head. "There are some services," he declared, "which pay themselves. For these it is not proper to take money."

The lady gazed at him for a moment silently. Then, "There are some services for which money cannot pay," she said, "but which must be recognized in another fashion."

So she took him in her arms and kissed him, and they spent the whole night in the highest happiness, their regard for one another being only equalled by their passion.

Next day the lady visited the Temple. As soon as she began to pray, the Goddess revealed herself, and the lady told her story.

"Child," said the Goddess, "all has happened as was intended. Be content! Your beloved has learned that to have body but no spirit is to be fastened to a dying animal. Henceforth you are his spirit. You have experienced that spirit, without body to act for it in the world, is at last no more than a refinement of self-love. Henceforth, he is your body and your action. Go! Be an example in the world of happiness, as you had wished to be an example of triumphant virtue."

* * *

CONJUGATION

The motto of the rabbit?
Amo, amas, amabbit.

DAVID MCCORD

PACO'S DONKEY

After all the work and the hope and the love, was he to be defeated now?

by MARTHA GELLHORN

THE home of Mr. and Mrs. Pedro Ramirez occupied a corner position in a fashionable neighbourhood. Down the street stood the finest hotel in Cuernavaca, an elegant stone structure which happened to be bankrupt. Next door a Texas millionaire lived invisibly behind high walls covered with crimson bougainvillaea and blue plumbago. Across the street a block of modern flats gleamed with glass bricks and chromium trimmings. Behind the Ramirez home were other handsome residences, protected by their walls and their trees and their iron grille gates.

The Ramirez house was built of unpainted jagged planks, which Mr. Ramirez had salvaged in the town. The floor of the house was mud; the roof was pieces of corrugated tin and pieces of corrugated paper, which were painted with tar and almost kept out the rain. The house was perhaps fourteen feet long by eight feet wide, not including the front porch.

Mrs. Ramirez had decorated the porch railing with plants in tin cans, and an empty bird cage hung beside the front door. There were no windows. Mr. and Mrs. Ramirez were squatters, and lived on their corner site in reasonable contentment, under the pouring Mexican sun, with five children. Paco, aged nine, was the eldest son.

Paco was small, thin, brown-skinned, and quick to laugh. He looked and acted like all the other little boys who live in the streets of Cuernavaca.

These children are full of knowledge and keep no regular hours. During the day they offer to help tourists, or anyone else who will pay four cents for their services. They hang about the market and carry shopping bags and armfuls of flowers. They watch cars: "Watchee car, meester?" they ask, in a curious Chinese-English that seems to be their professional language. Sometimes they shine shoes; sometimes they sell chicle gum.

Mainly they observe, mock, wrestle with one another, giggle; at night they tire of the day's work and do a little begging. They all seem to be the same age and height; they all have beautiful teeth and wise, ironical brown eyes. Miraculously, their mothers keep

them fairly clean, and most of them are dressed in ragged clothing of various shades of white.

Paco, like the others, was a serious breadwinner. He gave his mother his daily earnings—sometimes as much as forty-eight cents—and also helped with the younger children. He was a model son, but model sons, up to a certain age, are routine in Indian families, and the Ramirezes took Paco for granted. Paco loved the streets of his little town, and was always amused by the oddities of visiting foreigners. He respected his parents and was fond of his brothers and sisters. But his heart's refuge, his great friend, was the donkey Asuncion. And because of Asuncion, Paco had recently begun to hate his parents, Cuernavaca, and life in general.

When Mr. Ramirez married, Asuncion was his total capital. Asuncion had a small head, lovely, pleading, sleepy eyes, and a grey hide. Her character was all gentleness and trust. Mr. Ramirez used Asuncion, as a man might use a truck, in a very small hauling business. But at last no amount of beating would make Asuncion carry anything anywhere; she was too old and too tired. Mr. Ramirez, facing facts, gave up hauling and got a job on the new streets that were being built in Cuernavaca.

Since Asuncion did not work, Mr. Ramirez did not feel she ought to eat; it was hard enough, with his and Paco's earnings, to feed the family. Asuncion lived on whatever she could scrounge in the neighbourhood. Paco, blinded by love, had scarcely noticed that his friend was starving.

In the dry season, Paco often left the crowded room where all the family slept, and moved out into the yard to lie next to Asuncion. There was nothing he could not tell Asuncion. She had cheered his decision to buy an especially large and shiny American car and become a taxi driver. She had rubbed his cheek in approval when Paco told her that he was going to win the Lottery and go to the pictures every night.

When Juan Salinas beat up Paco during a quarrel over eight cents a tourist lady had told them to divide, Paco went home and cried in bitterness and pain against Asuncion's flank. His mother would have whipped him for having torn his shirt; his father would have sneered at the ambitions Asuncion admired.

Some afternoons Paco would give himself a half holiday and lead Asuncion to the nearby springs, where, leaving the dingy bath-houses and restaurants and blaring juke boxes behind, they would wander up the stream and bathe. Paco never rode Asuncion, for she was his friend and equal.

When Paco finally noticed Asuncion's wheezing, starved condition, he spoke to his father.

" Papa, Asuncion is hungry."

" I believe you."

" But, Papa, Asuncion must have more food."

" From where ? Who is to offer this food ? "

" But, Papa, she will become sick. Can I keep just a peso each day for Asuncion ? "

" No, stupid."

Deceit entered Paco's life. They would never notice, he thought, if he saved fifty centavos for Asuncion ; but you could not buy very much for that, and he was not sure Asuncion would thrive on the diet of stale *tortillas* he brought her from the market.

" Papa, Asuncion has a sore," Paco told his father one day. The sore was ugly, and flies fed on it ; it must have hurt Asuncion, though she never complained.

" Now she has a sore. Then she will have more sores. She is old and useless. Soon she will die," Mr. Ramirez said unconcernedly.

Paco stared at his father in horror.

After his father had left, Paco approached his mother.

" Mama," Paco said in a desperate voice, " Asuncion has a big sore."

Mrs. Ramirez was sweeping the house with a broom made of twigs. She straightened her back as if it hurt her, and turned and screamed at Paco, " Asuncion has a sore ! Tell me what the baby has ! That is what I desire to know. What do I care if Asuncion happens to have a sore ? "

Paco was alarmed by his mother's voice and face. Looking at the baby, who lay on a mound of rags in the corner, he did notice that Consuela seemed more like an ancient monkey than a baby ; but Consuela was not dying of sores—that he could see. Paco walked slowly to the market, thinking terrible new thoughts.

His parents had been nice enough to Asuncion when she worked for them ; but now, when she was old and sick, they forgot her. Eventually when Paco himself became too old to work they would let him lie in the yard and starve. Asuncion had no one except him to protect her from the world's wickedness. He would need at least ten pesos to buy medicine for her sore and food to put fat on her poor bones. He had never had ten pesos at one time in his life.

Paco was crying softly when he got to the market, and Juan Salinas shouted at him, " What's the matter ? Did your Papa beat you ? " The other boys jeered at him, too, saying, " Little girl, go and cry in your mamma's lap." But Paco was too sad and too occupied with hopeless schemes for getting ten pesos to notice these insults.

When a big boy of thirteen cuffed him, as an experiment, Paco did not defend himself, but only tried to escape. This was the

beginning of a bad reputation, which grew every day, until Paco hated to go to the market. He knew he was not a weakling or a coward, as the other boys said; he was a man filled with sorrow. He could do nothing but mourn, and business fell off. The more he longed for money, the less he earned.

Asuncion got five more sores and tottered about the neighbourhood looking very bad, trying to find edible garbage. Someone must have reported her, for presently a man wearing a collar and tie and city hat appeared at the Ramirez house and told Mrs. Ramirez that he was from the Department of Sanitation, and that her donkey menaced the health of the community and must be done away with. If Mrs. Ramirez failed to attend to this matter, she would be fined, and here was a piece of paper to prove it.

Mr. Ramirez, informed of this visit when he came home that night, shouted with rage, saying that the government existed only to molest the poor. But a fine was unthinkable; it was also unthinkable to kill Asuncion in the yard and bury her there, with Paco weeping all over the place and the other children frightened. Besides, Mr. Ramirez did enough digging in the streets and did not wish also to dig graves. It was decided that when Paco was asleep, Mr. Ramirez would lead Asuncion to the nearest ravine and push her over the side. There was no other way.

At that time Paco was in the habit, as soon as he awoke, of taking his troubled spirit to Asuncion, for comfort and conversation. She was sick and dying; he was friendless, outcast, shamed, and a failure in business. He stood with his arms around her neck and talked to her.

"We are without luck, Asuncion," he often said. "How do you feel, little one? Was the night long? I hope I can bring you something good today. There are not so many tourists this year, and the other boys are quicker. I do not have a success." Asuncion understood and did not blame him, and Paco stroked her ears, thinking how kind she was and how brutal his parents were and how no one in the world had any sense of responsibility for old donkeys.

But this morning, Asuncion was gone. Paco burst into the house, where his family were stretching and mumbling on their mats in the grey early-morning light. He shook his father, something he had never imagined doing, and shouted at him, "Where is Asuncion? What have you done to Asuncion?"

Mr. Ramirez sat up, fully awake, and was astounded by his son's face. A grown man who wished you great harm might have eyes like that—flaming eyes, not brown any more but hot with a red-black fire. Mr. Ramirez suddenly understood that this boy would one day cease to be a boy, and would take orders from no one.

Mr. Ramirez found himself answering his son with respect. He explained the visit of the man from the Department of Sanitation, and added, " It is the best thing, Paco. She only suffered ; her life was no pleasure to her."

" Where is she ? " Paco shouted. " In what barranca ? "

Mr. Ramirez explained that he had taken Asuncion to the ravine behind the Calle Humboldt. He had gone so far because he did not want the Department of Sanitation to connect him with any donkey's corpse and perhaps make him dig a grave after all.

Paco sped away. When he was out of sight of his house, he began to cry ; he ran, gasping and choking with sobs and with a stitch in his side. He pictured how Asuncion would look, bloody and broken, lying at the bottom of the barranca.

When he arrived at the top of the barranca, he could not at first find her. It did not occur to him to call to her, as one did not call to the dead. He peered over the edge, far down into the green depths of the ravine, where the river was only a wet trickle over stones now, in the dry season. Then he saw Asuncion, lying on her side, looking sad and forlorn, but with her eyes open. When Paco called, she moved her ears, which was all she was capable of.

Mr. Ramirez had done an incompetent job, not being able to see in the dark and not knowing the shape of this particular ravine. He had pushed Asuncion, who had lost her balance and rolled over the edge. But she had rolled only twelve feet or so down a gradual slope, to lodge on a little platform of brush with her back against an amate tree.

The large tree trunk, growing flat against the rock that supported this ledge, held her safely ; the tree shaded her against the sun. She was stunned and weak, but apparently comfortable.

Paco slid down the side of the ravine and took Asuncion's head in his hands. He kissed her and stroked her neck and flanks. He ran his hands gently over her legs and along her back, but he could not feel any broken bones. " You are never going back there," Paco promised the donkey. " They will never have a chance to be cruel to you again. You stay here. It's a nice place, and no one will find you. You stay here, and I will bring you everything. You do not need to worry any more, Asuncion; you can have confidence in me."

Paco was hungry and tired, but driven now by passion. He ran back to the town, and the fire was still in his eyes. He went to the post office, because the gringos and other foreigners stopped there in the morning to see if they had mail or to post the letters they were always writing. A tall man came out of the post office, reading a letter. Paco stopped him.

" Sir," he said, in a commanding voice, " the donkey is entirely very sick. She is in a grave state. There is no one to help her

except me, and I am without money. Sir, I beg you to help Asuncion."

The man, a middle-aged American, decided the child looked feverish. Though this tale about a donkey was unlikely, still, something was wrong; and there was no slyness in the boy's face, as if he were telling a pitiful lie to trick a foreigner. Besides, the man's letter was a most agreeable communication from his broker in New York, and he felt he might spread his luck, as a sort of thank offering. He gave Paco five pesos, which was an enormous amount to receive all at once. Paco babbled his thanks and fled; he was afraid the gringo would ask for change.

Now Paco ran to the veterinary's; he needed medical advice. The veterinary was a fat man who lived in a very fancy house and drove a turquoise-blue American car to call on the expensive ailing dogs of the rich. He was about to leave on his morning rounds when Paco arrived. Being Mexican himself, he got the whole story, including the attempted murder of Asuncion, from Paco. He was certainly not going to any ravine to visit a donkey already condemned by the Department of Sanitation, and five pesos was hardly a suitable fee; but the child's face impressed him. Dr. Galindo had an uncomfortable feeling that the child's condition was more serious than the donkey's, so he gave Paco a small jar of ointment to put on Asuncion's sores, told Paco to keep the donkey warm and feed her a nourishing diet of barley, oats, bran, corn, and alfalfa and grass as dessert, and charged Paco one peso for the salve.

To keep Asuncion warm, Paco needed a sarape. Behind the market there was a dank area of small wooden shops where second-hand clothes, stolen goods, and old metal were sold.

Juan Salinas, loitering nearby, went forward to block Paco. "Where are you going in such a hurry, girlie?" he asked.

In answer, Paco kicked him.

The boy of thirteen, who amused himself every day by giving Paco a few brisk slaps, moved in to tell Paco where to get off; no worms would be allowed to turn. He raised his hand to hit Paco, and Paco grabbed his hand, bit him hard above the wrist, butted his head in the boy's stomach, and ran off. He had no time to lose, and no one had better get in his way ever again.

Soon Paco had a dirty brown sarape, an empty petrol tin to carry water, and the ointment; he could not manage more at present, and he was anxious to see Asuncion.

She murmured her pleasure when Paco brought the water, and drank with great thirst. She must have liked the feel of the black ointment on her sores, and certainly the flies did not like it, for none returned to settle on the greasy stuff. It seemed to Paco that Asuncion had not looked so happy in months, and from the way she

moved her ears and flashed her eyes at him, he knew that she was proud of him.

All he had to do now was buy food, and for that he needed more money. His stomach felt hot and empty, and his legs ached, but he must get food for Asuncion before he ate or rested himself.

The morning drinkers had already gathered on the terrace of the Marik Hotel and at the pavement tables in front of the Universal Café. There were the regulars, who lived in Cuernavaca, and the tourists, who were worn out from buying straw hats and bags and silver jewellery and sandals. The tourists compared purchases and told one another what they'd paid ; the regulars languidly swapped whatever morsels of gossip they had collected.

Paco had never begged in the daytime ; at night you just emerged from the dark, held out your hand, made wide, hopeless eyes, and waited until you were given a coin or shooed away. In case a waiter flapped a napkin at you, you could scuttle back safely into the shadowed street.

In the daytime, begging might even be dangerous. Beggars were not allowed in restaurants or cafés ; the street was their legal province. Paco did not consider this. He opened the wooden gate that led to the Marik terrace and walked to the nearest table. Paco touched the arm of a man who looked Mexican and could be expected to understand.

" Sir," Paco said, " please help me. It is for my donkey, Asuncion." *My* donkey, Paco heard himself saying and his eyes filled with tears. He had never used this word ; nothing had belonged to him. But Asuncion was his ; he was father and mother to Asuncion now, in her terrible trouble. " My donkey is dying of sickness and hunger," Paco insisted. " I have bought medicine, but now I must buy food. Please, sir, give me money quickly." He spoke to this man as easily as if he had known him always ; he was not shy, and the words came readily.

" Look at his cute hair," said the blonde lady at the table, who wore the sort of astonishing clothes tourists did. " Aren't they the cutest things with that straight black hair ? Just like dolls. What's he saying, Luis ? "

Luis, a high-class Mexican guide, explained. " He says he has a sick donkey ; he needs money to buy food for it. That's a new one. I've heard everything—sick mother, sick father, sick aunt, sick baby brother—but I've never heard of a sick donkey before." Luis laughed heartily and made a brushing gesture of dismissal to Paco.

" Oh, the poor little kid," said another lady, who was also blonde and dressed in what tourists believed to be Mexican clothes. " He's going to cry. Go on, Bill. Give him some money."

Her husband reached into his trouser pocket and pulled out a small wad of soiled pesos. " Here, son," the American said. " Go and buy your donkey a steak."

" You give him too much," Luis said. " You will spoil him."

But Paco had bowed and mumbled his thanks, and was at the next table, where three middle-aged ladies, wearing yards of new silver jewellery, were seated.

" What do you want, little boy ? " one of the ladies asked.

Paco told her of Asuncion, speaking earnestly and with the new, warming pride of ownership and responsibility. He would have liked to tell these ladies of Asuncion's beautiful eyes and her great sweetness, but there wasn't any time for that.

" I don't get a word of it," the lady said cheerfully when Paco had finished speaking.

Luis, at the next table, remembered that tourist ladies were crazy about animals and always cooed over the little Mexican burros, so he leaned over and said, " He has a sick donkey. He's collecting money for its doctor's bills."

The three ladies laughed, as Luis had intended, and one of them said, " Well, I'm glad to know the children care about animals, anyhow." She took out her note-case, and carefully chose a starchy new peso note.

The head waiter, a well-known enemy of boys, hurried from the bar, and his square Aztec face looked murderous. " Get out of here, shameless one," he hissed at Paco, and waved an empty tray menacingly.

Paco thanked the lady and walked with dignity to the street. He was not shameless, and he was afraid of no one—not of the boys in the market, or of the Marik head waiter, or of his father. There was no room for fear in his mind ; the life of Asuncion was his one concern.

A smartly dressed lady, sitting outside the Universal, called to him, " Good morning, Paco. What are you looking so serious about ? " This was Mrs. Montgomery, who lived in a big house on the Calle Dwight Morrow, and sometimes Paco carried flowers home from the market for her.

" I need money for my donkey, Asuncion, Señora," Paco explained gravely, and Mrs. Montgomery listened to his story.

" Here you are, Paco," Mrs. Montgomery said, and gave him three coins more than she had ever given him for carrying flowers. " Let me know how Asuncion gets on."

Without being asked, the men at her table handed Paco coins.

" For the first time in five years," one of them said, " I believe one of these kids."

Mrs. Montgomery watched Paco approach the next table. His

face is quite wonderful, Mrs. Montgomery thought, although a little boy shouldn't look so old, or as if he knew so much about suffering.

Paco walked across the street to the small square where the bandstand was. He sat on a bench, hunched over to hide his money, and counted what he had begged. Six pesos and forty centavos— as much as his father earned in a whole day digging on the street. Asuncion would eat well now, after all these months. At the market, he would buy himself a *tortilla* with a little meat in it before he fell down from hunger; then he would carry Asuncion her first fine meal, and they would sleep together under the tree. Everything's going to be all right, Asuncion, Paco promised in his mind. I can do anything now. No one will ever hurt you again.

In the months that followed, Paco became famous as the boy with the sick donkey. The market boys left him alone; he was known to be dangerous. Also, they respected him, for they had never seen a child so determined and so sure of himself. They admired the way he talked to the foreigners, as if he were as old and as rich as they were; they admired the way he dared to beg in the daytime, anywhere, even if there was a policeman around or a waiter who might hit him across the face with a napkin, which hurt, as they all knew.

The tourists were told about the sick donkey by other tourists, who had heard the story the day before and were delighted with their inside knowledge of local life; the old residents recognized Paco and inquired after his donkey.

Coldly, Paco had decided to give his mother two pesos a day out of the money he earned and begged for Asuncion. He did not give this money because she was his mother and he, as her son, was supposed to turn over his earnings; he was paying for his board and roof, as a working man would. But the rest of the money was for Asuncion, for food and more of the black salve and another sarape.

Paco was grave and devoted in his work, and his heart burned with pride, because he knew that he had saved a life, and that she who depended on him was not disappointed. Asuncion thrived, Asuncion's sores healed, Asuncion looked positively merry.

In an absent-minded way, Mr. Ramirez beat Paco twice, to teach him to earn more money, and also because he could not discover where Paco stayed all day, or why he came home so late at night. Paco could not prevent tears of pain from oozing under his eyelashes, but he refused to cry or speak; so Mr. Ramirez, who had troubles of his own, forgot about beating Paco.

The condition of Consuela depressed Mr. and Mrs. Ramirez; they adored the baby, with the fresh, inexhaustible love that Indians lavish on each new child. Paco was almost ten, almost a man, and

could look after himself. If Paco did not do his duty by his family, at least he was quiet and unobtrusive in the home. His parents ignored him.

It was June now, and Paco worried about the rains. He would have to build a shelter for Asuncion ; the tree did not protect her from the nightly downpours of the wet season, but he had another, greater cause for anxiety. First he had been tormented by Asuncion's pitiful boniness, but now she was too fat ; her stomach seemed dangerously swollen. Perhaps there was a fatal kind of fat-sickness of which he was ignorant.

Asuncion seemed unaware of her alarming state. She lay down a great deal ; but she talked—you might almost say chattered—gaily whenever Paco was with her. Still, there was something peculiar about her, and at last Paco decided to get Asuncion up the side of the barranca and take her to the veterinary.

Because Asuncion was so fat, it was a struggle to haul her to the top of the ravine, and when they stood together in the weeds, Paco watched his friend with anguish. Her sides went in and out, her mouth was open, and she seemed exhausted by the effort. Now Paco was sure Asuncion was very sick, and he told her not to hurry and not to be nervous ; it was only a short walk to the doctor's, and the doctor would help her.

When Dr. Galindo came home for lunch, in his splendid blue car, he saw a boy and a donkey lying on the grass by his drive. He shouted at them to get out of there. What did they think this was, a public park ?

Paco went to meet him at the garage and said, " Sir, I have brought my donkey, Asuncion, the one you cured of sores. Now she is sick with something else; her stomach is too fat. I have four pesos."

Dr. Galindo was surprised and pleased by the success of his ointment, and surprised and impressed by the tenacity of this skinny, fierce-looking child. Paco turned away while Dr. Galindo examined Asuncion ; he feared Asuncion would be offended by the doctor's treatment. Aside from a few soft moans, which brought sweat to Paco's forehead, Asuncion submitted bravely.

Dr. Galindo stood up and brushed his knees and said, " Your donkey is going to have a little donkey in about five months. She is old to be a mother. Take her home now ; she's all right. Feed her well, and keep her warm and dry."

Paco looked dazed. This was a greater problem than he had imagined. He had only foreseen some new, perhaps expensive, medicine, but not months of special care and the difficulties and terrors of birth. The ledge in the ravine would not be safe for Asuncion ; he could no longer manage alone.

" If it is a *burrita*, you can name her ' Carlotta,' " Dr. Galindo suggested.

" Why, sir ? "

" It is the name of a queen. You will want a fine name for your little donkey."

Paco's eyes shone ; he had not yet thought how it would be to have a little donkey. Asuncion and her daughter, Carlotta, and he would be happy together. Paco held out his four crumpled pesos, smiling now.

Dr. Galindo pushed away his hand and said, " Nothing. Run along. I am late."

In the street, Asuncion seemed shy and would not look at Paco.

" You should have told me, Asuncion," Paco said. The donkey whinnied softly. No, I won't scold her, Paco thought. See how happy she is ; she wants to have a daughter named Carlotta.

Now they would have to go home, because Paco did not know how to build a shelter, but Mr. Ramirez could easily make one of palm leaves, and when it was time for Asuncion to have Carlotta, his mother would know what to do. No matter how wicked and unreliable his parents had been in the past, they could not be cruel to Asuncion now.

Mrs. Ramirez was at first frightened by the sight of Asuncion, as if a ghost had walked up to their house. Paco explained what had happened, from the morning when he had found Asuncion on the ledge, up to the doctor's diagnosis. Mrs. Ramirez, toasting *tortillas* over a charcoal fire, listened, fascinated, and promised Paco that Asuncion would be well treated and that Paco could keep the money he earned, except for two pesos, to feed his donkey.

It was a beautiful summer. Everyone was interested in Asuncion, who, though old, dying, almost dead, had returned to life in this triumphant manner. The Ramirezes were pleased by the attention of their friends and were proud of Paco, who had brought them this fame. Asuncion lay in state under a roof of palm leaves, growing steadily fatter. Paco again had the heart to laugh and wise-crack and wrestle with his equals ; his parents again seemed worthy of love and respect ; even Consuela was better and now looked like an old apple instead of an old monkey.

Paco thought constantly of Carlotta, imagining her eyes, her ears, and her fur. He planned trips to the stream above the nearby springs with Asuncion and her little daughter.

Mr. and Mrs. Ramirez also thought about Carlotta.

" It is God's will," Mr. Ramirez said. " I will renounce the street digging and return to the hauling with Carlotta. I will have my own business again."

" Asuncion was a strong donkey in her youth ; her child should be a fine animal."

" You will see. We have nothing to worry about any more. The baby will get well ; we will have enough money again."

" Paco is a good boy," Mrs. Ramirez said.

" It is God's will," Mr. Ramirez said. " He wishes us to be happy after all."

Carlotta was born towards the end of December, on a clear evening when the stars were high and small and brilliant in the sapphire sky. Paco was not present at the birth. He had stayed as long as he could ; but the sight of Asuncion, racked by pain, was too much for him, and he stumbled into the little house and lay down on a mat, with his hands over his ears.

Mr. and Mrs. Ramirez worked, under the palm-leaf roof, in growing anxiety. Asuncion, after all, was very old for motherhood ; besides, it could not have helped her to be shoved over the side of a ravine when in a weakened condition. Still, Paco had fed her as if she were a politician's wife all these months. But she was old ; she was having a bad time.

Paco cried and sweated himself to sleep. When he awoke, he stepped over the bodies of the younger children and crossed the yard to Asuncion's quarters.

Asuncion was asleep, with a look of complacent pride on her face. Beside her lay a tiny *burrita*, all ears and legs, with a fuzzy brown coat of fur. Asuncion had reason to be proud of Carlotta. Paco knelt to kiss Carlotta, and Asuncion opened her eyes, looking rather miffed and bossy about her newborn. Seeing it was Paco, she murmured a great deal of what Paco took to be baby talk, and Paco kissed her, too.

" How do you feel ? " Paco asked.

Asuncion seemed to smile.

Paco brought the feedbox his father had made. " You eat a lot now—you need your strength. I'm glad it's over, Asuncion. Carlotta is entirely very beautiful."

The morning drinkers were surprised to see Paco, radiant and relieved, behaving like a new father. He went from table to table at the Marik and the Universal Café, and crossed the square to visit the German delicatessen opposite the Cortez Palace. He wanted to tell everyone the good news about Asuncion's baby, Carlotta.

He ran to the market and informed the boys and the ladies who were doing their day's shopping and the various friends of his family who had vegetable stands in the market. He moved in a cloud of joy to the music of the world's congratulations. He asked for no money ; he wanted only to share his happiness. But money was given him.

" Buy a bed jacket for Asuncion," an American gentleman suggested, offering Paco three pesos. " For the christening party," said a lady resident, holding out another peso note. " For a silver mug with Carlotta's name," " For a cradle," " For diapers," people shouted at Paco, handing him this unexpected money.

Paco was laughing and crying with pleasure and excitement. This was surely the greatest day of his life. And he had never seen so much money ; he must have had eighteen pesos by the time he got home, with a feast of barley and bran and oats for Asuncion.

Then no one saw Paco for a week ; he stayed with Asuncion and acted as nurse to Carlotta. The morning and afternoon drinkers asked one another for news of Paco and his donkey family.

Mrs. Montgomery was having a drink on the terrace of the German delicatessen with her friend Mrs. Harvey, of New York. Mrs. Harvey wore real gold jewellery from the north, instead of real silver jewellery from the pushcarts in the street. The light from the delicatessen and from the ice-cream parlour next door shone on a patch of mangy grass, which was the playground and resting place of all the hungry dogs in the neighbourhood and all the street boys.

Paco sat on the grass, cross-legged, staring ahead of him at the gasoline station and the laurel trees and the cheerful evening crowd. He saw nothing. He had come here only because he had to go somewhere ; he had to leave his home and the palm-leaf shelter of Asuncion. He had to be alone.

" What can have happened to Paco ? " Mrs. Montgomery asked suddenly.

" Who's Paco ? " said Mrs. Harvey.

" That boy out there, the little one with the huge brown eyes."

" Goodness, doesn't he look sad ? "

" I can't imagine why," Mrs. Montgomery said. " He was so happy a week ago, about Carlotta."

" Carlotta ? "

" The daughter of his donkey, Asuncion."

Mrs. Harvey laughed.

" You don't know," Mrs. Montgomery said. " The fate of Asuncion has been the biggest news in Cuernavaca all the autumn. We are deeply involved in the happiness of Asuncion. It's one of our main interests."

Mrs. Harvey laughed again. " I adore this ridiculous place," she said.

" Paco ! " Mrs. Montgomery called, but Paco did not hear her.

One of the boys near Paco tapped him on the shoulder. " The señora," he said respectfully, for Paco was a boy you had to handle with care, " she wants you."

Paco got up and went to the table.

" What has happened, Paco ? "

In a low voice, as if he were talking to himself, Paco said, " Carlotta died. Asuncion could not feed her ; she was too old. And Carlotta did not like what we gave her. She died. Papa says Asuncion is no good ; she should have died instead of Carlotta. Papa says he will push Asuncion over the barranca again. He says he will not have a worthless donkey lying in the yard, eating more than the whole family. Carlotta is dead. They do not love Asuncion. They were only nice to her because they wanted Carlotta."

" What's he saying ? " Mrs. Harvey asked softly. " I never saw a child look so tragic."

Mrs. Montgomery translated rapidly.

" How pathetic," Mrs. Harvey said, reaching for her purse.

I am too little, Paco thought, I can't do any more. He could not defy his parents any longer. He could not hide Asuncion again, and work and work alone until his legs and his back and his head ached. He was defeated, and Asuncion was lying beside the body of Carlotta, groaning. Asuncion was brokenhearted and doomed and he could not help her. He had failed.

Mrs. Harvey put a ten-peso note into Paco's hand. He did not look at it or thank her. He stood with his arms at his sides, too tired and too bewildered to move.

" Paco," Mrs. Montgomery said, " you could bring Asuncion to my garden until you make other plans."

Paco did not answer. After all the work and the hope and the love, there was nothing but this. His father despised Asuncion for being too old ; his mother said the money he had spent on Asuncion would have fed all the children so they'd be fat, instead of having a fat, useless donkey and thin children. They blamed him ; they hated Asuncion. He was defeated.

" Paco," Mrs. Montgomery said urgently. " Paco, listen to me. Paco, don't give up. Don't give up ever."

Mrs. Montgomery was astonished by her own voice and the passion in it. I've lived here too long, she thought. I make a mountain out of a donkey. Not a donkey—a boy. It was vitally important that this boy shouldn't give up. The boy stood for something, even if she did not know exactly what.

Paco turned, walked to the corner and down the long, wide cement boulevard, under the hideous street lamps. His bare feet made no sound, and his thin, white-clad body seemed to float. He sat on the kerb under a street light and looked at the bill in his hand, and then he bowed over, rocking himself in an agony of sobs. Ten whole pesos in one piece ; he could use them only to buy a wreath and a cross for Carlotta's grave. That was the last thing he would

be able to do for Asuncion—provide a fine grave for her daughter.

Then suddenly he thought, No, no, I won't. No. I won't leave Asuncion. I won't let them be cruel to her. I will take Asuncion away tonight. I will not let them murder her again. Ten pesos. That would feed her for nearly five days, and by then he would have more money. When the rains came, he would build a shelter, and he would do everything that needed to be done. Asuncion was not to be abandoned in her sorrow. Asuncion believed in him.

He stood up and headed towards his house. His feet dragged on the pavement. He had slept little in this last terrible week, he had forgotten to eat, he had cried too hard for all the misery in the world. But he knew where he was going, and what he was going to do. That's what it is for a man, Paco told himself; he has to fight. That's what he has to do all his life. Perhaps you never won, perhaps Carlotta died; but you could not stop.

" You can have confidence in me, Asuncion," Paco said to the empty street. " I will not fail."

* * *

IT'S A GIFT

Acceptable enough these presents, celebrated in verse and prose—although unlikely items for a Christmas shopping list! Allow one mark for the gift, one for the source and one for the author, making a possible score of twenty-four. The answers are on page 92.

1. *The thirteenth gift, but by far the luckiest for a very young Royal personage.*
2. *Don't leave birthday gifts lying around. This one nearly brought disaster to two charming women.*
3. *Coals to Newcastle, in a sense, these presents from a noble lady to a wise man.*
4. *The poet sent it to a lady to keep it fresh.*
5. *By handing this gift over to the nation the old lady fulfilled her nature and outraged her family.*
6. *What he gave the Princess was her own, but she thought it only fair to let him have a little something in return.*
7. *The Marquis presented this family heirloom to the daughter, but later he turned it into ploughs for the mother.*
8. *To present a gift and get it back by a trick! Was this suitable behaviour for a wise and upright judge?*

SING, HEAVEN IMPERIAL!

For now is risen the bricht day-ster
Fro the rose Mary, flour of flouris

WILLIAM DUNBAR, 1465–1530

A snowy field! A stable piled
With straw! A donkey's sleepy pow!
A Mother beaming on a Child!
A manger, and a munching cow!
—These we all remember now—
And airy voices, heard afar!
And three Magicians, and a Star!

Two thousand times of snow declare
That on the Christmas of the year
There is a singing in the air;
And all who listen for it hear
A fairy chime, a seraph strain,
Telling He is born again,
—That all we love is born again.

JAMES STEPHENS

The First Crib

Now three years before his death it befell that he was minded, at the town of Grecchio, to celebrate the memory of the Birth of the Child Jesus, with all the added solemnity that he might, for the kindling of devotion. That this might not seem an innovation, he sought and obtained licence from the Supreme Pontiff, and then made ready a manger, and bade hay, together with an ox and an ass, be brought into the place.

The Brethren were called together, the folk assembled, the wood echoed with their voices, and that august night was made radiant and solemn with many bright lights, and with tuneful and sonorous praises.

The man of God, filled with tender love, stood before the manger, bathed in tears, and overflowing with joy. Solemn Masses were celebrated over the manger, Francis, the Levite of Christ, chanting the Holy Gospel. Then he preached unto the folk standing round the Birth of the King in poverty, calling Him, when he wished to name Him, the Child of Bethlehem, by reason of his tender love for Him.

ST. BONAVENTURE, *Life of St. Francis of Assisi*, 1263

Ring Out —

Christmas woke me early, in the small dark hours, as if someone had touched me on the shoulder and said, Wake up, wake up, it's Christmas. I woke up and it was dark, and would not be Christmas for hours . . . Yet Christmas Day must come ; one had long expected it, and here it was. Perhaps it was a dream. But of a sudden the still dark was shaken and shattered and a-clamour with bells. Not the gay sweet chiming of an English church peal, but harsh, clanging, iron, tremendous, a very roar and tumult of noise. The great Roman brick tower of Sant Ambrogio in the large piazza outside the windows, the striped black and white tower of San Domenico in the small piazza up the street, the more distant, but patronal, Santa Caterina along the sea road beyond the town, the church of the Collegio up the hill path, the chapel of the convent school, all with one accord awoke to Christmas morning and clanged their summons to Mass. They were insistent, commanding, almost menacing. English bells, sweetly and uncertainly tumbling as they chime, seem to sing, *Come along to church, good people if you please, come along to church on Christmas Day.* These bells cry, *Venite, venite, il Signore v'aspetta, levatevi pronto, pronto, e fatte il dovere.*

But to me they only shouted, *Christmas Day ! Christmas Day !*

ROSE MACAULAY, *Personal Pleasures*

Carol

We saw him sleeping in his manger bed
And faltered feet and heart in holy dread,
Until we heard the maiden mother call :
' Come hither, sirs, he is so sweet and small.'

She was more fair than you have looked upon ;
She was the moon, and he her little sun.
' O Lord,' we cried, ' have mercy on us all ' ;
But ' Ah,' said she, ' he is so sweet and small.'

Whereat the blessed beasts with one accord
Gave tongue to praise their little blessed Lord,
Oxen and asses singing in their stall :
' The king of kings, he is so sweet and small.'

GERALD BULLETT

The Christmas Night

A hundred tongues proclaim the holy night.
Toward the west a new world brims with light.
The holy east recalls the tread of kings
Upon a mystic journey for a sight
Of God in poverty and heavenly wings.

How many candles burn in sultry climes
How many southern belfries play their chimes,
For the white festival the children keep
With cotton-wool for snow and age-old rhymes
To lull a cradled infant God to sleep.

The air tonight is charged with gentle zest.
Workshops are stilled. The stabled horses rest.
The berry on our northern holly gleams.
Goodwill speaks forth, to south and east and west.
Peace joyously breaks into earthly dreams.

JOHN PUDNEY

The Feast of Light

The whole great room was filled with the fragrance of slightly singed evergreen twigs and glowing with light from countless tiny flames. The sky-blue hangings with the white figures on them added to the brilliance. There stood the mighty tree, between the dark red window-curtains, towering nearly to the ceiling, decorated with silver tinsel and large white lilies, with a shining angel at the top and the manger at the foot. Its candles twinkled in the general flood of light like far-off stars. And a row of tiny trees, also full of stars and hung with comfits, stood on the long white table, laden with presents, that stretched from the window to the door . . .

Thick candles burned in all four of the gilded candelabra in the corners of the room. Large objects, too large to stand on the table, were arranged upon the floor, and two smaller tables, likewise adorned with tiny trees and covered with gifts for the servants and the poor, stood on either side of the door.

Dazzled by the light and the unfamiliar look of the room, they marched once around it, singing, filed past the manger where lay the little wax figure of the Christ-child, and then moved to their places and stood silent.

THOMAS MANN, *The Buddenbrooks*,
translated by H. T. Lowe-Porter

★*Nellie Forbush was "Our Heroine" to her home town in Arkansas and to thousands of people during the record-breaking run of "South Pacific" in New York. Now, still played by the gay and irresistible Mary Martin, she has enchanted thousands more at London's famous theatre, Drury Lane, where the play is already booked well up to Easter. Argosy is proud to present the original story:*

SOUTH PACIFIC

by JAMES A. MICHENER

TWO weeks after Nurse Nellie Forbush learnt the truth about Lieut. Harbison she received a newspaper cutting from Little Rock, Arkansas. In the section devoted to rural news was a large and pretty picture of her in uniform. The caption read: "Our Heroine. Otolousa Girl Arrives in New Hebrides to Help Wounded Americans."

Nellie looked at the photograph smiling at her from the newspaper. She was younger then, and much more sure of herself. She hadn't been seasick for eight days. When that photograph was taken she hadn't lived in mud, on poor food, under a stinking mosquito net. Nor did she have a lonely feeling about her heart, so that days and nights were the same.

No, she was a happy girl when she posed for that picture. She had gone into Little Rock with her mother and Charlie Benedict. They were both proud of her, her mother because she looked so fine and patriotic in her new uniform. Charlie because he hoped to marry her.

Charlie had been unexpectedly glum when the pictures were delivered to Otolousa. "You're beautiful!" he said. "You'll never come back."

"I want to see the world, Charlie," she had replied. "I want to meet other people. I want to see what the world's like. Then, when the war's over, I'll come back." Neither she nor Charlie believed that she would.

In the New Hebrides she was seeing plenty of people. Too many! She was often the only girl among a hundred men. Most of them wanted to make love to her. But that isn't what Nellie

Forbush meant when she said she wanted to see the world. She had meant that she wanted to talk with strange people, to find out how they lived, and what they dreamed about, interesting little things that she could treasure as experience.

Hers was the heart-hunger that has sent people of all ages in search of new thoughts and deeper perceptions. Yet at the end of a year in a Navy nurse's life Nellie had found only one person who shared her longing for ideas and experiences. It was Dinah Culbert. She and Dinah were realists, but of that high order which includes symbolism and some things just beyond the reach of pure intelligence.

She was sorry, therefore, when Dinah was ordered north to help set up a new hospital. They were talking together the night before Dinah left. Together they were laughing at poor, handsome Bill Harbison. They heard that he was drinking a good deal. Nellie had already told Dinah of how she had proposed to Bill and been refused.

The two nurses were still talking when they heard a commotion by the guard house. An Army officer was helping a nurse out of a jeep. A doctor was running over. Soon heads popped out of all the windows. They saw another doctor come up and start to attend the officer. Like fire, news spread through the dormitories.

It was that quiet nurse who liked the Army captain. The one stationed in Vila. He was driving her home. They had stopped for a while. Near the air field. No, nothing much happened. They were watching the 'planes. Three men jumped out of the bushes at them. They had clubs. They knocked the captain down and started to pull the nurse out of the jeep. When she screamed and fought, one of them tried to hit her with a club. He missed her and broke one of the assailants' arms. The wounded man bellowed. Then they got mad and grabbed her by one arm and one leg. She held on to the steering wheel, and the captain started to fight again. They hit him once more, and then . . . .

A car came by. The three assailants saw it coming and fled. The two Army men were in the jeep and gave chase to the culprits. But by that time the would be rapists were gone. One of the Army men drove the captain's jeep to the hospital. The captain was badly beaten around the head. The nurse was shivering from shock, but was not hurt.

From then on nurses rarely went out at night unless their escorts carried loaded revolvers. In the hot mornings Lieut. Harbison and his friends practised target shooting so that in the cool nights they could protect their girls. Of course, the Army captain who had defended his nurse so well supplanted Harbison as the local hero. The captain became a greater hero when he

proposed to his nurse and was accepted. They used to sit in the corner of the hospital club and talk. Lieut. Harbison was now going with a scatter-brained floozy. After she was sent home he took up with a divorced nurse who knew he was married. They worked out some kind of arrangement. Nellie used to nod at them whenever she saw them. She noticed that Bill was getting fat.

There were many other attacks or near attacks on nurses in the islands. They were grim, hushed-up affairs. Nobody ever knew exactly what had happened. Just rumour and surmises. But in time every nurse knew she lived in danger. In spite of this, Nellie found herself watching men with a deeper interest. The good men seemed better when there was trouble. The armed enlisted man who drove the hospital car when she went riding with officers seemed more willing to protect her.

" Men seem even nicer now than they did before," she said one day as Dinah was packing. " I thought it would be the other way round."

" Men are always nice," Dinah laughed.

" I was thinking the other night, Dinah. Out here good people seem to get better and bad people get worse."

" That's true back home, too, Fuzzy-brain. Wait till you know some small town really well, Nellie."

" But this is the first time I knew that everybody lives in danger all his life. We do, really. It's just that bit by bit we make arrangements that cancel out the dangers. We have certain girls to take care of certain men. If a man wants to become a crook or a gangster, we have . . . Well, we seem to have certain areas more or less staked out for him. Is that true ? "

" I don't know, Nellie," Dinah said as she packed her duffle bags. " All I know for sure is that so far as I have been able to determine, nothing you can possibly imagine is impossible. Somebody's doing it or is going to do it. That goes for the good as well as the bad."

Shortly after Dinah's departure, shocking news was received at the hospital. Bill Harbison and some men from Headquarters were flying down to Noumea for fresh vegetables. The 'plane caught fire. Radioed its position east of Noumea. It went into the rough ocean and all hands were lost.

Nellie could not work and had to be excused from her duties. She lay down, and against her will, she cried. It was horrible to think of a man so young and able dying so uselessly. In that moment Nellie found that war itself is understandable. It's the things that go along with it, things that happen to people you know, that are incomprehensible, and have been in all ages. She was physically ill for three days.

Then, in a flash, word came that all but one of the men had been found on a life raft. They were knocked about, but they would be all right. Harbison was saved. Again Nellie stayed in her room. She found that she did not want to see Bill, but that she was very glad he was alive. She realized that Bill carried part of her with him, and she was happy when that part lived again. Yet when the handsome young lieutenant appeared in the hospital with his indefinite nurse trailing along, Nellie felt sorry she had seen him again. He was sunburnt from his exposure, handsomer than ever. Every night for a week he sat at one table or another with his nurse, telling about the days on the raft. They must have been horrible.

Nellie was rescued from her emotional impasse by thoughtful Dinah, who asked for her to be sent north. Gleefully, she packed and waited for the 'plane. She had never ridden in a 'plane before. She watched it come in from Noumea, carefully noted the busy work that accompanies any landing or take-off, and gasped when she saw how exquisite Efaté and Vanicoro were from the air. The pilot purposely flew east a bit so his passengers could see the volcanoes.

Dinah met her at the airfield. And that night she met Emile De Becque. It was at a dinner given in a French plantation home in honour of the new nurses. Nellie, Dinah, three other nurses and some doctors were seated in an open-air, roofed-in pavilion by the ocean. Candles provided flickering light. Screens kept moths away, and a small Tonkinese boy went around periodically with a mosquito bomb which he delighted to make fizz. Young Tonk men served the food, which was very good.

At another table sat two Frenchmen having their dinner. One was short and fat, the proprietor of the plantation. Nellie had met him earlier in the evening. The other was a remarkable fellow. He was in his middle forties, slim, a bit stoop-shouldered. His eyes were black and deep-set. His eyebrows were bushy. He had long arms and wrists, and although he used his hands constantly in making conversation, they were relaxed and delicate in their movements.

Nellie tried not to stare at the Frenchman, but while waiting for the lobster and rice, she was detected by the proprietor studying his guest. The fat Frenchman rose and approached one of the doctors. " Ah, docteur ! " he cried in bonhomie. " May I present my very good friend, Emile De Becque ? He is our foremost De Gaullist ! " At this recommendation everyone at the table looked up.

De Becque nodded slightly and rose. As he stepped towards the hospital dinner party, the rotund plantation owner continued

his introduction: "M. De Becque was our first and bravest De Gaullist. He rounded up much support for the general. And when the Japanese threatened, M. De Becque and a young sea captain went to all the islands and arrested all suspicious persons. If the Japs had landed, he would have been our resistance leader."

M. De Becque nodded again and smiled in turn at each nurse as he was introduced. Nellie noticed that he looked particularly French because his hair came so far down on his forehead. He wore it short, and the neatness of his head and his strong features offset the inevitable sloppiness of tropical clothes.

"M. De Becque arranged the details for our flight to the hills," the plantation owner went on. "Did you know we were going to hide out until you came? M. De Becque arranged for many natives to act as guides. All women were armed."

Nellie was later to discover that in all the New Hebrides, if you could believe what you were told, there was not one Pétainist. And yet, as she looked at the fat proprietor and many others like him, she had a strange feeling that of them all only Emile De Becque acted from conviction. She felt he would have continued to act so, had Pétain himself occupied the islands.

She saw a good deal of De Becque in the ensuing weeks. The tall Frenchman was eager for someone to talk to, and although he could not express himself perfectly in English, he could make himself understood. De Becque never called on Nellie. The doctors, always an interested group of men, asked De Becque to their dinners from time to time. After dinner was over, Nellie and Dinah and one or two other nurses usually joined the party and argued politics or when the war in Europe would end. The Frenchman was an able arguer, and not even the handicap of language prevented him from impressing on all present the fundamental soundness of his reasoning. Soon he was the only Frenchman attending the informal arguments at the hospital; for whereas any plantation owner was interesting once or twice as the product of an exotic world, De Becque was of himself interesting.

"I suppose," he once said, "that men were either De Gaullists or Pétainists a long time ago. I think they grew up that way. Of course," he added slyly, "some never grew up, and it was those we had to play with."

"But why," a doctor asked, "did you elect to follow De Gaulle, in particular?"

"De Gaulle?" the Frenchman asked. "It wasn't De Gaulle, but what De Gaulle stands for! What decent man could do otherwise?"

After De Becque had been a guest at the hospital several times he proposed that he act as host one night at his plantation. The doctors were delighted. "The nurses, too?" the Frenchman suggested, lifting his shoulders and stretching the word *too* into three syllables.

"Why not?" the doctors asked, and a few nights later a small party of Americans chugged up the hill to De Becque's plantation. It was situated upon an extensive plateau overlooking islands and the sea. Most British and Frenchmen in the islands like their houses abutting on the ocean, but not De Becque. He favoured the grand view! And from his verandah there was such a view.

His house was built in an octagon with one side twice as long as the others. In that side he lived, had a few books, a radio, and an old gramophone. In the other seven sides he had a dining room, a warehouse, a store, a series of bedrooms, and a completely furnished room for guests. In the latter one might expect to find a missionary, a Tonkinese family, a government official, or a trader. On the night of his dinner the room was empty.

In the centre of the octagon was placed the kitchen, a small, low, sooty building into which only the Tonkinese cooks went. From it came a series of fine dishes. Around the one-storied house clustered an odd collection of buildings whose original purposes were long since lost. Tonkinese and natives lived in them and followed their mysterious ways. A Buddhist temple crouched on the edge of the jungle. It gave visiting missionaries much concern, for natives found its tinkling bells and rhythmic drums much more fun than Methodism or provincial Catholicism.

The long room with its deep verandah faced south, and from it one could see four lovely things: the channel where the great ships lay; the volcanoes of Vanicoro; the vast Pacific; and an old Tonk's flower garden.

Nellie thought she had never before seen so florid a garden. There were flowers of all kinds, azaleas, single and double hibiscus, hydrangeas, pale yellow roses, and plants she did not know. About the garden were flamboyants and bougainvillaeas, red flaming bushes. And everywhere there were capriciously placed frangipani trees. De Becque pulled half a dozen branches for his guests and showed them how native men wear the four-leafed, white and yellow flowers in their hair. The nurses smelled the flowers their host gave them, and were delighted. The frangipani was the odour of jungle. It was sweet, distant, and permeating. In addition it had a slightly aphrodisiac quality, a fact which natives learned long ago.

De Becque's dinner put to shame any the doctors had ever offered him. It started with soup, grilled fresh-water shrimp, lobster and rice, and endive salad. Next came in succession three

courses: fillet of porter-house, lamb chop, and a delicious concoction of rice, onions, string beans, and black meat of wild chicken. Then De Becque served the "millionaire's salad" consisting of tender shoot of coconut palm sliced wafer-thin and pressed in olive oil, vinegar, salt and pepper. Cup custard with rum, small cakes, coffee, and a choice of six liqueurs ended the meal. And all this was on the edge of the jungle, 550 miles from Guadalcanal!

"Where did you get lobster?" a doctor inquired.

"We catch them here by various means. Out in the deep water."

"How about the wild chicken?"

"Those black men you saw by the gate when you came in. They shoot them with arrows or with .22s. They are wonderful shots, I think."

"I think so, too," the doctor replied. "But where do you get such big shrimp?"

"Far up the island rivers. You see, my friends, we don't eat this way every day. That's obvious. Not more than once every two weeks. You see for lobster I must tell the men five days in advance. For shrimp a week. For wild chicken, two days."

"How did you train the natives to serve so well?" Dinah asked. "They actually seemed to enjoy it."

"I am patient with them," the Frenchman answered. "They make their mistakes on me, and when they serve you they are prepared to do a good job. Isn't it that way at the hospital?"

"Tell me, M. De Becque," an inquisitive doctor asked, "how long did it take you to organize and build this plantation?"

"Twenty-six years," De Becque said. "I came here as a young man."

"You chop it out of the jungle yourself?"

"With some natives and a family of Javanese workers."

"The yellow people I saw outside. They're not Javanese, are they?"

"No," De Becque replied. "They're Tonkinese. Very fine workers. We bring them over from Tonkin China."

"You were willing to throw all this away in the event that Pétain won?" Dinah inquired. The Frenchman smiled at her.

"I thought that this was the war to prove that Pétain could never win," he said graciously.

After dinner the guests sat in the screened-in verandah. A doctor had brought along two mosquito bombs to keep the pests away. Their host served whisky, beer, coke, ginger ale, root beer, and rum. As the evening wore on and a fine crescent moon rose into the midnight sky, talk turned to the islands.

" How can a man have stayed so healthy here ? " one doctor inquired.

" Hard work and temperate living," the Frenchman replied. " I serve a great deal of alcohol but use it sparingly myself. I have tried to do all things in moderation."

The nurses wondered what " all things " covered. " Do you think other white people could live in the tropics, too ? " one asked. " That is, as well as you have ? "

" They do," he said. " I think will power has a lot to do with it."

" Tell me, M. De Becque," a nurse asked. " Is it true that most white men in the tropics are running away from something ? "

The Frenchman turned in his chair to face his impertinent questioner. She was a young girl, so he smiled. " Yes," he said. " I believe that is true. Suppose that I was running away from something. Where could I find a lovelier spot than this ? " He swept his hand across the front of the verandah and pointed towards the silent peaks of Vanicoro. " As a matter of fact," he said in a quiet voice, " is not each of you running away from something ? You were not married yet, your lovers were at war, or your wives were beginning to bore you. I don't think it wise to inquire too closely into reasons why anybody is anywhere ! " He smiled at the embarrassed nurse.

" Oh, M. De Becque ! " she said. " I didn't mean it that way ! "

" I know you didn't, my dear ! But that's the way I understand the question. It's no good to think that all the men in Marseilles are normal and happy without secrets and everyone out here is a fugitive ! That sort of thinking is foolish in today's world. I wonder how many men and women in Marseilles envy me right now ? "

It was after midnight, and the nurses had to return. They were reluctant to leave the plantation. At the gateway where the jeeps were parked M. De Becque detached Nellie from the group. She had stood so that he could if he were so minded. " Ensign Forbush," he said. " You have shown great interest in my home. I would like to have you visit the plantation again."

" I should like to," Nellie replied frankly.

" With your permission I shall call for you one afternoon. You would enjoy my cacao grove."

Three days later, in the cacao grove, Nellie admitted that she had never seen anything which so impressed her with its natural, unexploited beauty. Within that grove she was to spend many of the happiest hours she would ever know, and one of the bitterest.

Plantation owners in the tropics usually plant their coconut

trees in stately rows along the ocean front and inland for a mile or two. Grass is kept closely cropped beneath the trees so that fallen nuts can be gathered without difficulty. Most coconut groves look very neat. The tall palms appear like thin ballet dancers with fantastic head-dresses. But a cacao grove grows haphazardly. It usually forms the boundary between plantation and jungle. Trees spring up helter-skelter from year to year, and around them jungle brush proliferates. At times it is difficult to tell where cacao trees end and violent jungle begins.

At the point where his cacao and coconut met, De Becque had long ago built himself a pavilion big enough for two or three people. Its base was teak wood in eighteen-inch planks, its half-sides of woven coconut palm, and its roof of heavy thatch. Two benches of mahogany and two massive, comfortable chairs of teak were the only pieces of furniture. Four grotesque rootoos, native masks carved of coconut log, decorated the four corners. Two were incredibly long-nosed jungle gods and two were native views of white women, with red lips. The masks gave colour to what might otherwise have been a barren pavilion.

It is doubtful, however, if anything could be barren within a cacao grove. As Nellie waited in the pavilion while De Becque talked with his natives, she could hardly believe that what she had thought of as the monotonous jungle could be so varied. Above her flew an endless variety of birds. White, green, red, purple, and yellow lorikeets more beautiful than any bird except the quezal swirled and eddied through the grove. Their harsh cries were modified by the delicate chirping of a graceful swallowlike bird that flew in great profusion among the cacao trees. This gracious bird was sooty black except for a white breast and belly. Gliding and twisting through the shadows it looked like a shadow itself. Then, bursting into the sunlight, its white body shone brilliantly. At times sea birds flew as far inland as the cacao grove, and occasionally a gaunt hawk from the distant hills would settle there for a day and drive the darting swallows away.

But it was the cacao tree that won Nellie's admiration. The cacao is small, hardly more than a bush, reaching at most twenty feet in height. It has a sturdy trunk, thick branches about five feet from the ground, and grows symmetrically. Its leaves are brilliantly glistened like poison ivy, only more shimmering. And they are of myriad colour! Some are pale green, others darkest green, some purple, some almost blue, or grey, or bright yellow. And on most trees at least fifty leaves are brilliant vermilion, shading off to scarlet and deep red. Each leaf is irridescent, and dead leaves drop immediately from the tree.

A cacao grove, in rainy weather, is a mournful and lovely place.

In bright sunlight it is a hall of mirrors, and at dusk it has a quality of deep jungle quiet and mysteriousness that is equalled nowhere else in the tropics. In large measure these attributes are aided by the beauty of the cacao pods themselves. They grow in fairy-tale manner. In late January and February the cacao puts out buds that will later grow into pods. They appear without reason at the strangest places! Two inches from the ground on a barren, stiff trunk, a pod will suddenly appear. On one branch there may be a dozen pods. On another, none. In the crevice formed where a branch leaves the trunk a cluster of pods may appear and the branch itself may be bare. A mature cacao in full season looks as if someone had stood at a distance and flung a huge handful of random pods upon it.

At first the miniature pods are light purple. Then as they grow to full size, they become a weird greenish purple, like the paintings of Georges Braque. Next they are all green, and from then on they become the chameleons of the jungle. On one tree mature pods, which now look like elongated cantaloupes seven and eight inches long, will be bright green, golden yellow, reddish yellow, red, purple, and greenish purple. And on each tree a few will be dead, charred, black, ugly, with small holes where rats have eaten out the sweet seeds, which, when toasted and ground, become cocoa.

While Nellie waited for De Becque to finish the work he was doing, she studied the grove and mused upon the perverseness of people whereby *cacao* in French becomes *cocoa* in English. The multicoloured lorikeets, the irridescent leaves, and the flaming cacao pods formed a superb picture for a hot afternoon. Later, when her host appeared, tall, stooped, and breathing hard, she asked him to sit by her.

"Why did you build this pavilion?" she asked.

"I like to be near the jungle," he said, remaining in the doorway.

"Do you come here on rainy days? Is it nice then, too?"

"It's best on rainy days," he said. "But it's strange. The place serves no purpose. It's too far from the kitchen to eat here. There's no bed, and it isn't screened in. Yet I think I like it better than any place on my plantation."

"I was looking at the cacaos," Nellie said in a sing-song kind of voice. To herself she was saying, "I shall marry this man. This shall be my life from now on. This hillside shall be my home. And in the afternoons he and I will sit here." Aloud she continued, "They are beautiful, aren't they?"

"A rugged tree," he said. "Not like coconuts. But they don't pay as well."

" Mr. De Becque," she began. " That sounds silly, doesn't it. I meant M. De Becque."

" Why don't you call me Emile ? "

" I should like to," she said, half laughing in self-consciousness.

To himself De Becque said, " This is what I have been waiting for. All the long years. Who ever thought a fresh, smiling girl like this would climb up my hill ? It was worth waiting for. I wonder . . ."

" Emile ? " Nellie began. " May I ask you a question ? "

" Of course you may," he replied smiling.

" Why did you leave France ? "

There was a long pause. Nellie and Emile studied one another across the little distance of the pavilion. Outside swallows darted through the cacao trees and lorikeets screamed at them for trespass. It was a jungle day, warm, heavy, thick with sunlight.

" It was not to my discredit," the Frenchman replied.

" I know that," Nellie assured him.

" I killed a man," Emile went on, dreamily, his voice blending into the heavy silence of the cacao grove.

" Why ? " Nellie asked, not the least disturbed. It seemed as natural a mode of behaviour for Emile De Becque as writing a letter. He had said, " I killed a man," and she was relieved that it was not something serious.

" A town bully. A town cheat. It was in a little place near Marseilles. Everyone was glad to see him die, and the fault was his. But they thought I should leave. The police investigated for three days, giving me time to get away. I could not make up my mind and an old man who had been a sailor told me, ' I was on an island once. The men wore pig's teeth and the women wore nothing. Anything you planted would grow on that island. With a little money a daring man could make a fine living there and become rich.' I listened to him, my mind in revolt. Then he said something that decided me : ' And opposite the island is another island with two volcanoes. You can see them all the time.' That did it. My mother had always wanted to see Naples. She read a book about Pompeii and wanted to see Naples. She never did. Lived all her life right near Marseilles.

" I clapped the old sailor on the back and shouted, ' You have a good idea, old man ! I'll see *two* volcanoes ! ' I left that night, and the next day the police came to my home. ' Where is Emile De Becque ? ' they demanded. ' He is wanted for murder.' The old people in the house said, ' He ran away ! ' ' The scoundrel ! ' said the police. ' If he comes back, we'll arrest him. Mark our words, we'll get him ! ' They were furious, and all the time I was sitting in a café in Marseilles, waiting four days for a ship.

They knew it and were afraid to send news to Marseilles, because they knew that sometimes ships lay over three or four days. Finally they sent a young fellow in to spy me out. He found that I was gone, and posters soon appeared in Marseilles. But I have never gone back."

"How did you kill him?" Nellie asked, surprised at her courage.

"With a knife," Emile said, showing some satisfaction, even at that distance.

"You've never regretted being out here, have you?" she asked.

"Never!" he said emphatically and simply. Then he added a peculiar comment. "This plantation is worth more than a hundred thousand dollars."

In the cacao pavilion the two strangers looked at one another. Each had a half smile. De Becque's gold tooth showed. Nellie's infectious grin fought for possession of her full lips. She thought that he was not an old man, and yet not a young man, either. He was a respected man, wealthy, a man with deep ideas. He was one who killed with a knife, came out for De Gaulle, and was to have led resistance against the Japs.

"Nellie," he said quietly, scarcely audible above the lorikeets. "In the hottest months you could go to Australia." Nellie made no reply. She merely watched De Becque as he rose, crossed the silent pavilion, and bent over her. She raised her lips. Although he merely brushed her lips with his, she had the distinct impression that she had been kissed by a man, a whole man, a man worthy to be loved.

He sat upon the arm of her teakwood chair for several minutes. "I must go soon," she said quietly. As she rose, standing beside him, she noticed that her nose came to his shoulder. Standing there, with it pressed against his moist shirt, she asked, "Are you married, Emile?"

"No," he replied.

"I'm so glad," she murmured, pressing her nose deep into his shoulder. He patted her on the head and led the way down the long path that wound among the coconuts.

"You have dinner?" the Tonkinese cook asked.

"Just for me," De Becque replied. "I'll be back soon."

"Emile," Nellie said as he stopped his Australian car by the guarded wire gate. "Let me think for a few days. I'll tell you then."

"All right," he said.

That evening Nellie confided the news to Dinah. "I think I'll marry him," she said.

"It's hot on this island," Dinah replied.

"It's hot in Arkansas, too," Nellie said, laughingly.

" But you can get out of Arkansas."

" And I can go to Australia, too. Many women do in these islands. During the hot season."

" I don't suppose it's up to me to tell you that you hardly know the man," Dinah said, looking at the pretty young nurse.

" I don't want you to say that, Dinah," Nellie said. " But when I was in love with Bill Harbison you said that you knew I was heading for trouble. Do you feel that way now ? Do you, Dinah ? "

The older woman thought a moment. " No," she said. " As a matter of fact, I envy you. That is, if you have the courage to do it. This isn't an easy life."

" But it's a life, Dinah ! We can get books here, too. Emile reads a lot in French. We can talk about things."

" Nellie," Dinah said seriously, " why don't you write a long letter to your mother ? "

When the airmail answer arrived from Mrs. Forbush it was filled with pocket knowledge accumulated from a long life. It read in part : " Marriages of older men and young girls work for a while. But you must think of the future. Will you be happy there if he dies before you do ? . . . The women of the place, if they are mostly French, will not like it having you there. Have you thought of that . . . Love can make almost any marriage work, and if he has money, as you say, that is all so much the better . . . What do you really know about him ? Why did he leave France . . . He is probably a Catholic, too . . . Nellie, I always thought you might marry Charlie Benedict. He has a good job now . . . If your Pop was alive, he would probably say, ' Go ahead. Three square meals a day is as good there as here ! ' But life ought to have more than three square meals a day. You ought to have friends and old places to help you along . . . "

Mrs. Forbush rattled on, casting merits against demerits and came to the tentative conclusion that it was Nellie's life and she would have to lie in it. Mrs. Forbush had her metaphors mixed, but her conclusions were sound. Nellie showed the letter to Dinah. " Your mother has good sense," the older nurse said.

" She'd have to have, to raise four of us," Nellie laughed. " But I want something more in life than she had. Mom didn't have much."

" She had enough to raise four pretty good kids," Dinah laughed. " And she didn't learn good sense out of a book."

" I think I'll marry him," Nellie said.

When De Becque called for her next day she suggested they spend the afternoon in the pavilion. When they reached it, they were warm and breathing hard. Again the sun was hot upon the

cacaos, and the lorikeets were wild in protest over some imagined slight. Suddenly they grew quiet.

"Look!" Nellie cried. "Look!"

A great hawk of the islands was sweeping overhead in long circles. It had come down from the mountains. No swallows were to be seen. With a delicacy foreign to his intent, the hawk sailed quietly by, moving a wing slightly now and then. Soon he was gone, and the brave lorikeets were out once more with furious chatter.

"I've thought as best I can, Emile," the young nurse said. "I want to marry you!"

"Fine!" Emile said with much restraint. They kissed twice. Then they sat in massive chairs and watched the life and beauty of the cacao grove.

"It will be a good life, Nellie," the Frenchman said. "You will like it. There is a good hospital on the other island. And if you like, you can go to Australia to have your children. The boat comes once every three months, and there are many people here. I have my own small boat, and two plantation owners have a large power launch. I shall teach you to read French, too. I have many books. And we can get English books, too. I have not told you, but I have a lot of money saved."

At the thought of having saved things over the years Emile grew pensive. Outside the birds called to one another and the golden cacaos reflected sunlight from their myriad facets. "I will die before you, Nellie, since I am older," he said in a reflective manner. "But if you like the islands then, you will have no need to fear hunger or poverty. And if you have children, they will be growing up. By that time there will be an American base here. Your little girls will have fine American young men to choose as husbands. And if you don't like the islands, you can then return to America. You will have enough to live on."

Nellie could say nothing at this comment on eventual death. The hawk was idling in the dark sky and the lorikeets, like Nellie, were silent. They, too, were thinking of death.

Before De Becque left Nellie at the wire gate of the nurses' quarters, he told her that he would be gone for a few days. He had to deliver some beef to the island on which the French government had sequestered all young girls and unmarried women. It was a small island some sixteen miles distant, and there white, yellow, and black girls lived protected from the inroads of American troops far from home and inhibitions. De Becque and other planters kept the island supplied with food. For the first time, Nellie kissed him goodbye at the gate. She winked at the guard.

"We're getting married!" she said.

While De Becque was gone, she visited the Navy captain who commanded her hospital. She told him that she intended to marry De Becque and asked what arrangements could be made.

" It's a long process," the captain warned her. " I don't understand it myself. The Army has charge of details in this area. But I'll take you to see the general, Ensign Forbush."

He did, and Nellie found the general a kindly old man who had daughters about her age. " I don't approve," he said half severely, " but I know how it is when girls make up their minds. One thing, Ensign Forbush : Have you or your friends made inquiries into M. De Becque's past ? You have. Then we'll start the papers through the mill. But he'll have to appear in person. Bring him in when he gets back."

Nellie sighed and smiled at her commanding officer. The step was taken ! She was surprised at the interest a captain and a general took in her affairs. She felt happy and important.

At dinner that night Dinah Culbert asked Nellie if, seeing that De Becque was away, she might like to sit at a table where an entertaining naval aviator was a guest. He was back from a tour of the island and had some witty stories. At dinner Nellie sat next to the guest, a Lieut. Bus Adams. As the meal progressed he told one fascinating story after another. He made himself the butt of most of the humour, but as the evening wore on he finally asked for another drink and said, " I've never told this story before to a mixed group. It's really a man's story, but women might enjoy it, too. It's the only story I've run upon that fulfils the promise of these islands. I call it *The Frenchman's Daughter !* It took place on Luana Pori, and I know it's true. I know the Frenchman's daughter. She's a magnificent woman, about twenty-three. Half French, half Javanese ! " Adams continued with a rambling narrative that captivated his listeners.

Doctors and nurses alike were following him with intense interest as he finished. " There ! " he said. " Didn't I tell you it was a tropical story ? "

" I suppose all these islands are loaded with unbelievable happenings," a doctor suggested. " As strangers, we don't hear about them ! "

" That's interesting ! " Adams said. " Because if I understand correctly, the Frenchman in this story lives on your island. Quite a character, I'm told. Raised hell when they wanted to go Pétain some years ago."

Before anyone could stop him, Adams had blurted out the news. The Frenchman's notorious daughter was De Becque's daughter. Her mother was a Javanese. The Frenchman's three other daughters who lived on Luana Pori were half-Javanese, too,

but by a different mother. And somewhere near Vanicoro, on a small island, he had four other daughters, more beautiful than their sisters. The mothers of these girls were Polynesian and Tonkinese.

" He never married," Adams concluded. " Women were crazy about him, and he treated them fine."

Nellie Forbush sat very straight and smiled at the aviator as he spoke. Later on he refused to believe what the doctors whispered to him. " Oh no ! " he said.

Nellie smiled at the doctors and the other nurses. Taking Dinah's hand, she excused herself. The two nurses went down the long corridor leading to their own quarters.

It was strange, but Nellie found no cause to cry. De Becque was a man of the islands. He had lived here for twenty-six years. He was a powerful man, and women were plentiful. Through him they saw a chance of rearing fine daughters, half white, and they eagerly took that chance. To judge from Bus Adams' story, the De Becque girls were fine and beautiful. Latouche, the eldest, was apparently wild, but she was smart and lovely.

" I'll not make up my mind about anything," Nellie said to Dinah when they were alone.

" What's past is past, Nellie," Dinah reasoned. " I told you less than a week ago that I wasn't worried about De Becque. I'm not now. This is a rough life out here. He's lived it. And kept everyone's respect. Only fighters do that, Nellie ! "

" I'm not going to make up my mind," Nellie repeated. " Mom had a funny idea about that. Once she wanted a hat very much and had saved enough money to buy one. She went in to Little Rock with all the money in her hand. ' I won't make up my mind,' she kept saying to herself. Finally she was in front of the department store. There was exactly the hat she wanted. She looked at it for a moment and then started crying. Because the store had put new baby carriages in the next window. She had to have a baby carriage. It was for me. Mom always said it was best to live right and make up your mind on the spot."

The two women talked late into the night. Other nurses, catching the story by grapevine, spent the night telling one another what a rotten break it was that Nellie . . . They were somewhat disappointed when she appeared at breakfast bright and cheerful. She hadn't yet made up her mind to be heartbroken.

Two days passed, and finally De Becque called her on the hospital telephone. Mustering up her courage, she smiled at the other girls and hurried down to meet him. She noticed with apprehension that he was morose, too. In strained silence the

two lovers drove along the coral roads and up the hill to his plantation. They parked his car by the gate and walked slowly between the coconut palms. De Becque was silent, as if worried. Nellie's heart was pounding harder than her lungs. As they neared the end of the coconuts and the beginning of the cacaos, De Becque stopped impulsively and kissed his bride-to-be tenderly. " You are my hope," he whispered.

Nellie consciously placed her hand in his and walked with him towards the pavilion. She felt him trembling, and thought it was she. They paused a moment to watch the dipping black and white swallows. Then they stepped into the cool pavilion.

" Aloo ! Nellie ! " cried four young voices.

Nellie looked in astonishment at four little girls who stood behind one of the teakwood chairs. " Aloo, Nellie ! " they cried again. Then they came forth, in gingham frocks, pigtails, and curtseys.

Two were Tonkinese, that is, they were half Tonkinese, and they were beautiful as only Eurasian girls can be. They were seven and nine. Their almond eyes were black. Their foreheads were clean and high. They had very white teeth and golden complexions.

The two other girls were half Polynesian, daughters of that strange and proud race. They were round of face and darker than their sisters. Their eyes were black as pools at night, their hair the same, long and straight even in pigtails. They had rich mouths and splendidly proportioned bodies. They were ten and eleven.

At the end of their curtsey they said once more, " Aloo, Nellie ! "

" They're my daughters," De Becque said proudly. " I have four others. They live in Luana Pori with their married sister. I have their pictures here." From an envelope he produced a well-thumbed photograph of four tall, thin, sharp-eyed girls. The first and third were exquisite beauties, lovelier than Bus Adams had painted them in his story. The second and fourth were handsome girls, and only their sisters' storybook charm made them seem plain. Each had a quizzical smile on her lips.

" My family ! " De Becque said. He put his hand on Nellie's shoulder. " I had to tell you first," he said.

Nellie Forbush, of Otolousa, Arkansas, could not speak. She was glad that her mother had taught her never to make up her mind beforehand. Beside her was a strong, tough man. It was someone like him she had in mind when she said long ago, " I want to get out and meet people." It was not old ladies in white lace sitting by the fireside that Nellie wanted to meet. It was men and women who had courage. She looked at the picture of Latouche, De Becque's eldest daughter, and saw in her Emile's fire and

determination. Yes, Latouche could kill a man and fight the entire American Army. The aviator's story was believable. Nellie thought that she would like Latouche.

But before her were other indisputable facts! Two of them! Emile De Becque, not satisfied with Javanese and Tonkinese women, had also lived with a Polynesian. Her entire Arkansas upbringing made it impossible for her to deny the teachings of her youth. Emile De Becque had lived with this Polynesian. He had dark children. If she married him, they would be her step-daughters.

She suffered a revulsion which her lover could never understand. Watching her shiver, he motioned to the little girls and they left the pavilion. "Nellie," he said, pulling her into a chair and standing over it, "I have no apologies. I came out here as a young man. There were no white women in this area. I lived as I could. No woman ever hated me or tried to hurt me. You must believe me. I loved those women and was kind to them. But I never married because I knew that some day you would come to this island."

He stood before her in considerable dignity. He was not crawling, and yet by every word and gesture he was fighting to make her believe in him.

"Oh! Look at that big one!" the little girls cried in French. Their soft voices drifted through the pavilion like the sound of distant music. Nellie looked at them running among the cacaos. The little Polynesians were very dark, she thought. Almost black.

She swallowed hard. The pounding in her chest was still strong. "Where are their mothers?" she asked.

De Becque clasped his hands and looked away. "The Javanese are back in Java. They went a long time ago. I don't know where the Tonkinese is. She was no good. The Polynesian girl is dead."

Nellie was ashamed of herself, but a surge of joy ran through her entire body when she heard that the Polynesian was dead. Yet even as she entertained that thought the elder Polynesian child looked in at the window and cried in softest tones, "*Papa! Voilà une petite souris dans ce cacao!*" Nellie's hands went towards the window. The child had in her eager face and soft voice the qualities that made De Becque a man to love.

"*Va-t-en jouer!*" Emile said quietly.

"*Oui, papa,*" the golden little girl replied.

"I don't know what to say, Emile," Nellie mumbled. "You don't understand."

"I know it's a surprise, Nellie. And a rude one. I know that."

"No!" Nellie cried in real anguish, stamping her foot. "It isn't that! It's something you don't know."

De Becque, defeated by tears, stood aside. Why Nellie thought

he was incapable of understanding, it would be difficult to say. He had read of America. He knew something of its *mores* and shibboleths. And yet Nellie was correct in assuming that no Frenchman could understand.

"I can't . . ." She stopped in her explanation. It was no use. The inescapable fact remained. She buried her head in her hands and started to cry.

"Please take me home," she said.

At the foot of the hill the Tonkinese cook expressed his astonishment that she was leaving. He held up his hands in horror. "Dinner all fine. He cooked. He good!" the cook protested. Moved by his appeal, Nellie agreed to have dinner and then go immediately. At a separate table the four little girls, obviously great favourites of the cook, had their dinner. They babbled quietly in French, displayed exquisite manners, and excused themselves when they went to bed. Nellie caught herself whispering, "I would be happy if my children were like that!"

Emile drove down the hill in silence, but at the turn on to the coral road four thugs were waiting for the car. They had been planning this assault for some time, four crazy young Americans, their minds addled by wild emotions. As they leaped at the car, Emile sped the motor and whipped out a brass pipe on the end of a knotted chain. It cut across the face of one assailant and hit another on the head. The swerving car wiped the remaining two loose against a tree. De Becque drove furiously until he met some enlisted men coming the other way in a truck. Wheeling around in a spire of dust, he led them back to where the assault had taken place. One attacker had been unable to run away, his leg smashed in by the car. The enlisted men jumped on him and started beating the bushes for the others. They found one, dazed, his face and head bleeding. The others were gone.

"Take them to the police, if you please," De Becque said quietly.

"You bet we will, mister!" an Army man said.

The truck pulled away. De Becque slumped over the wheel for a moment. Then he carefully rewound his lethal weapon and stowed it where it could be most easily grabbed in a hurry. Nellie was afraid to talk. She rested her head on his shoulder. De Becque drove very slowly.

"The world is not pretty," he said. "It's only the hard work of some people that makes it so. Remember that, Nellie. This could be your island. Your home. You'd make it that!"

"You don't understand," she whispered. At the barred gate she made up her mind.

"What is it, Nellie?"

"I can't marry you," she said. "I could never marry you!"

De Becque kissed her goodbye. The guards smiled. They knew she was going to be married soon. She was a damned nice girl, too. If they were all like her. One guard made a circle with his forefinger and thumb. He winked at De Becque.

" Hey ! " he whispered to his pal when Nellie had gone. " The guy had tears in his eyes ! What the hell goes on here ? "

In her room Nellie undressed and lay upon the bed. She was excited and nervous. She thought of Emile De Becque and the little brown girls in the cacao grove. Her thoughts were as chaotic as those of the men who had attacked the car. " This place does something to you," she groaned. " I just can't think ! "

And then she knew what she wanted. Her mind was made up. She rose, pulled a dressing gown from a nail above her head, and started to write a feverish letter. It was to Charlie Benedict in Otolousa, Arkansas. She told him something he had been waiting years to hear. She would marry him. She wanted more than anything in the world to marry Charlie Benedict. Right away. Now ! She yearned for the safety and security of knowing what was happening and what had happened. She wanted Otolousa and its familiar streets. She didn't give a damn if she never saw another strange place the rest of her life.

At that moment Dinah Culbert entered the room. " Made up your mind ? "

" Yes ! I'm going to get married ! "

" Good ! Nellie, that's a fine decision ! " Dinah's enthusiasm upset Nellie a bit.

" But to Charlie Benedict back home ! " She bit her lip and laid the pen down. " Oh, Dinah ! " she cried. " I couldn't marry a man who had lived with a coloured woman ! "

" Of course not," Dinah said dryly. She didn't live in Arkansas and wouldn't understand. " Hello ! What's this ? " She picked up from Nellie's desk a picture from an Arkansas newspaper. " Why, Nellie ! " she cried. " This is you ! " Dinah looked at the picture approvingly. Then she read the caption, " Our heroine ! " She repeated the words, " Our heroine ! " Then she looked at Nellie, tears in her eyes, mouth drooping. " Our heroine ! " she shouted, waving the picture in Nellie's wet face.

Nurse Forbush caught a fleeting glimpse of herself in the cutting. She thought of the afternoon the picture arrived in Otolousa. " *I want to see the world, Charlie. I want to live with people !* " The ridiculousness of her situation amused her. She started laughing at Dinah. Then she laughed at herself. The two nurses caught one another by the arms and started dancing.

" Our little heroine ! " Dinah repeated over and over again

until her chuckling became uncontrolled. Then she sat in Nellie's chair. In doing so, she knocked the letter to Charlie Benedict on the floor. With a grand sweep Nellie picked it up and crumpled it into a little ball.

" So long Charlie ! " she cried, tossing the ball into a corner.

" Nellie ! " Dinah cried. " Where did you get this ? "

" What ? " the now half-hysterical Nellie answered.

" This picture. It was on the floor by your jacket." It was the picture of the four De Becque girls.

" Oh ! " Nellie cried in astonishment. " Emile must have . . ."

" What lovely girls ! " Dinah said.

Nellie stopped laughing. She looked over Dinah's shoulder. They were lovely girls. Look at Latouche ! Winsome and confident. Her three sisters, too. Calm, happy, cocky young girls. They seemed to be afraid of nothing. They seemed like their father.

" They *are* like De Becque ! " Nellie said in a whisper.

" What did you say ? " Dinah asked.

" Look, Dinah ! How much fun they seem to have ! "

" You'd never have a bored moment," Dinah said.

" And the four little girls ! Dinah, they're sweet. And so well behaved. Oh damn it all ! " Nurse Forbush walked up and down. She saw her letter to Charlie in the corner. " Damn it all ! " she cried again, kicking at the letter.

" Very reasonable behaviour ! " Dinah laughed. " For a little heroine ! "

" What's the use of bluffing, Dinah ? " Nellie confessed. She ran over to the older nurse. " Now I *have* made up my mind. I want to marry him . . . so very much ! " She started crying and sank her head on Dinah's shoulder. Dinah thereupon consoled her by crying, too. In mutual happiness they blubbered for a while.

" I think your mind is made up the right way this time," Dinah whispered.

" Quick ! " Nellie cried. " See if you can get a jeep ! We've got to get one right away ! I've got to tell him, tonight ! " She hurried about the room getting her clothes together. " Oh, Dinah! " she chortled. " Think what it will be like ! A big family in a big house ! Eight daughters, and they're darlings. I don't care who he's lived with. My mind's made up. Mom was right. Wait till the last minute ! "

In great joy she dressed and hurried downstairs with Dinah. While they waited for the jeep the guard asked, " Changed your mind, ensign ? "

" Yes ! " she laughed. " I did ! " He made a circle with his thumb and finger and winked at her. " Good hunting ! " he said.

Dinah urged their driver to hurry. "Can't do but twenty-five," he growled.

"But it's an emergency!" Dinah protested.

"It's always an emergency," the driver replied. "This is an awful island!"

"But this is a real emergency!" Dinah insisted.

"Oh! Well! Why didn't you say so?" the driver asked in a most co-operative spirit. "In a real emergency I always do 26."

Nellie winced as they passed the place where four men had jumped on the car earlier that night. As they reached the plantation, she directed Dinah and the driver to wait. Hurrying across the garden she went to the verandah. It was empty. The dining room was empty, too. Then she heard sounds from one of the bedrooms.

She hurried along the passage and found the source of the sounds. There it was. The little girls' bedroom. She opened the door. The four girls were in nightgowns, standing about a bed on which De Becque sat. They were singing *Au clair de la lune* in childish voices. Emile rose, smiled at Nellie, and hummed along with his daughters. Nellie added her uncertain treble to the chorus, and before long they were singing the old song so loudly that Dinah and the driver could join in from the jeep.

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THE MAN WHO KNEW HOW

"After all," he said, "there's a fascination about murder. It *grows* on you"

by DOROTHY L. SAYERS

FOR perhaps the twentieth time since the train had left Carlisle, Pender glanced up from *Murder at the Manse* and caught the eye of the man opposite.

He frowned a little. It was irritating to be watched so closely, and always with that faint, sardonic smile. It was still more irritating to allow oneself to be so much disturbed by the smile and the scrutiny. Pender wrenched himself back to his book with a determination to concentrate upon the problem of the minister murdered in the library.

But the story was of the academic kind that crowds all its exciting incidents into the first chapter, and proceeds thereafter by a long series of deductions to a scientific solution in the last. The thin thread of interest, spun precariously upon the wheel of Pender's reasoning brain, had been snapped. Twice he had to turn back to verify points that he had missed in reading. Then he became aware that his eyes had followed three closely argued pages without conveying anything whatever to his intelligence.

He was not thinking about the murdered minister at all—he was becoming more and more actively conscious of the other man's face.

A queer face, Pender thought.

There was nothing especially remarkable about the features in themselves; it was their expression that daunted Pender. It was a secret face, the face of one who knew a great deal to other people's disadvantage. The mouth was a little crooked and tightly tucked in at the corners as though savouring a hidden amusement. The eyes, behind a pair of rimless *pince-nez*, glittered curiously; but that was possibly due to the light reflected in the glasses.

Pender wondered what the man's profession might be. He was dressed in a dark lounge suit, a raincoat and a shabby soft hat; his age was perhaps about forty.

Pender coughed unnecessarily and settled back into his corner, raising the detective story high before his face, barrier-fashion. This was worse than useless. He gained the impression that the man

saw through the manœuvre and was secretly entertained by it. He wanted to fidget, but felt obscurely that his doing so would in some way constitute a victory for the other man.

In his self-consciousness he held himself so rigid that attention to his book became a sheer physical impossibility.

There was no stop now before Rugby, and it was unlikely that any passenger would enter from the corridor to break up this disagreeable *solitude à deux*. But something must be done. The silence had lasted so long that any remark, however trivial, would—so Pender felt—burst upon the tense atmosphere with the unnatural clatter of an alarm clock. One could, of course, go out into the corridor and not return, but that would be acknowledging defeat.

Pender lowered *Murder at the Manse* and caught the man's eye again.

"Getting tired of it?" asked the man.

"Night journeys are always a bit tedious," replied Pender, half relieved and half reluctant. "Would you like a book?"

He took *The Paper-Clip Clue* from his attaché case and held it out hopefully. The other man glanced at the title and shook his head.

"Thanks very much," he said, "but I never read detective stories. They're so—inadequate, don't you think so?"

"They are rather lacking in characterization and human interest, certainly," said Pender, "but on a railway journey—"

"I don't mean that," said the other man. "I am not concerned with humanity. But all these murderers are so incompetent—they bore me."

"Oh, I don't know," replied Pender. "At any rate they are usually a good deal more imaginative and ingenious than murderers in real life."

"Than the murderers who are found out in real life, yes," admitted the other man.

"Even some of those did pretty well before they got pinched," objected Pender. "Crippèn, for instance; he need never have been caught if he hadn't lost his head and run off to America. George Joseph Smith did away with at least two brides quite successfully before fate and the *News of the World* intervened."

"Yes," said the other man, "but look at the clumsiness of it all; the elaboration, the lies, the paraphernalia. Absolutely unnecessary."

"Oh, come!" said Pender. "You can't expect committing a murder and getting away with it to be as simple as shelling peas."

"Ah!" said the other man. "You think that, do you?"

Pender waited for him to elaborate this remark, but nothing came of it. The man leaned back and smiled in his secret way at

the roof of the carriage ; he appeared to think the conversation not worth going on with. Pender, taking up his book again, found himself attracted by his companion's hands. They were white and surprisingly long in the fingers. He watched them gently tapping upon their owner's knee—then resolutely turned a page—then put the book down once more and said :

" Well, if it's so easy, how would *you* set about committing a murder ? "

" I ? " repeated the man. The light on his glasses made his eyes quite blank to Pender, but his voice sounded gently amused. " That's different ; *I* should not have to think twice about it."

" Why not ? "

" Because I happen to know how to do it."

" Do you indeed ? " muttered Pender, rebelliously.

" Oh, yes ; there's nothing in it."

" How can you be sure ? You haven't tried, I suppose ? "

" It isn't a case of trying," said the man. " There's nothing tentative about my method. That's just the beauty of it."

" It's easy to say that," retorted Pender, " but what *is* this wonderful method ? "

" You can't expect me to tell you that, can you ? " said the other man, bringing his eyes back to rest on Pender's. " It might not be safe. You look harmless enough, but who could look more harmless than Crippen ? Nobody is fit to be trusted with *absolute* control over other people's lives."

" Bosh ! " exclaimed Pender. " I shouldn't think of murdering anybody."

" Oh, yes, you would," said the other man, " if you really believed it was safe. So would anybody. Why are all these tremendous artificial barriers built up round murder by the Church and the law ? Just because it's everybody's crime, and just as natural as breathing."

" But that's ridiculous ! " cried Pender, warmly.

" You think so, do you ? That's what most people would say. But I wouldn't trust 'em. Not with sulphate of thanatol to be bought for twopence at any chemist's."

" Sulphate of what ? " asked Pender, sharply.

" Ah ! you think I'm giving something away. Well, it's a mixture of that and one or two other things—all equally ordinary and cheap. For ninepence you could make up enough to poison the entire House of Commons—and even you would hardly call that a crime, would you ? But of course one wouldn't polish the whole lot off at once ; it might look funny if they all died simultaneously in their baths."

"Why in their baths?"

"That's the way it would take them. It's the action of the hot water that brings on the effect of the stuff, you see. Any time from a few hours to a few days after administration. It's quite a simple chemical reaction and it couldn't possibly be detected by analysis. It would just look like heart failure."

Pender eyed him uneasily. He did not like the smile; it was not only derisive, it was smug, it was almost—gloating—triumphant! He could not quite put a name to it.

"You know," pursued the man, thoughtfully pulling a pipe from his pocket and beginning to fill it, "it is very odd how often one seems to read of people being found dead in their baths. It must be a very common accident. Quite temptingly so. After all, there is a fascination about murder. The thing grows upon one—that is, I imagine it would, you know."

"Very likely," said Pender.

"Look at Palmer. Look at Gesina Gottfried. Look at Armstrong. No, I wouldn't trust anybody with that formula—not even a virtuous young man like yourself."

The long white fingers tamped the tobacco firmly into the bowl and struck a match.

"But how about you?" said Pender, irritated. (Nobody cares to be called a virtuous young man). "If nobody is fit to be trusted—"

"I'm not, eh?" replied the man. "Well, that's true, but it's past praying for now, isn't it? I know the thing and I can't unknow it again. It's unfortunate, but there it is. At any rate you have the comfort of knowing that nothing disagreeable is likely to happen to *me*. Dear me! Rugby already. I get out here. I have a little bit of business to do at Rugby."

He rose and shook himself, buttoned his raincoat about him and pulled the shabby hat more firmly down above his enigmatic glasses. The train slowed down and stopped. With a brief good night and a crooked smile the man stepped on to the platform. Pender watched him stride quickly away into the drizzle beyond the radius of the gas-light.

"Dotty or something," said Pender, oddly relieved. "Thank goodness, I seem to be going to have the carriage to myself."

He returned to *Murder at the Manse*, but his attention still kept wandering.

"What was the name of that stuff the fellow talked about?"

For the life of him he could not remember.

It was on the following afternoon that Pender saw the news item. He had bought the *Standard* to read at lunch, and the word

"bath" caught his eye; otherwise he would probably have missed the paragraph altogether, for it was only a short one.

"WEALTHY MANUFACTURER DIES IN BATH
—WIFE'S TRAGIC DISCOVERY

"A distressing discovery was made early this morning by Mrs. John Brittlesea, wife of the well-known head of Brittlesea's Engineering Works at Rugby. Finding that her husband, whom she had seen alive and well less than an hour previously, did not come down in time for his breakfast, she searched for him in the bathroom, where, on the door being broken down, the engineer was found lying dead in his bath, life having been extinct, according to the medical men, for half an hour. The cause of the death is pronounced to be heart failure. The deceased manufacturer . . ."

"That's an odd coincidence," said Pender. "At Rugby. I should think my unknown friend would be interested—if he is still there, doing his bit of business. I wonder what his business is, by the way."

It is a very curious thing how, when once your attention is attracted to any particular set of circumstances, that set of circumstances seems to haunt you. You get appendicitis: immediately the newspapers are filled with paragraphs about statesmen suffering from appendicitis and victims dying of it; you learn that all your acquaintances have had it, or know friends who have had it, and either died of it, or recovered from it with more surprising and spectacular rapidity than yourself; you cannot open a popular magazine without seeing its cure mentioned as one of the triumphs of modern surgery, or dip into a scientific treatise without coming across a comparison of the vermiform appendix in men and monkeys.

Probably these references to appendicitis are equally frequent at all times, but you only notice them when your mind is attuned to the subject. At any rate, it was in this way that Pender accounted to himself for the extraordinary frequency with which people seemed to die in their baths at this period.

The thing pursued him at every turn. Always the same sequence of events: the hot bath, the discovery of the corpse, the inquest; always the same medical opinion: heart failure following immersion in too-hot water. It began to seem to Pender that it was scarcely safe to enter a hot bath at all. He took to making his own bath cooler every day, until it almost ceased to be enjoyable.

He skimmed his paper each morning for headlines about baths before settling down to read the news; and was at once relieved and vaguely disappointed if a week passed without a hot-bath tragedy.

One of the sudden deaths that occurred in this way was that of a young and beautiful woman whose husband, an analytical chemist, had tried without success to divorce her a few months previously. The coroner displayed a tendency to suspect foul play and put the husband through a severe cross-examination. There seemed, however, to be no getting behind the doctor's evidence.

Pender, brooding fancifully over the improbable possible, wished, as he did every day of the week, that he could remember the name of that drug the man in the train had mentioned.

Then came the excitement in Pender's own neighbourhood. An old Mr. Skimmings, who lived alone with a housekeeper in a street just round the corner, was found dead in his bathroom. His heart had never been strong. The housekeeper told the milkman that she had always expected something of the sort to happen, for the old gentleman would always take his bath so hot.

Pender went to the inquest.

The housekeeper gave her evidence. Mr. Skimmings had been the kindest of employers, and she was heartbroken at losing him. No, she had not been aware that Mr. Skimmings had left her a large sum of money, but it was just like his goodness of heart. The verdict was Death by Misadventure.

Pender, that evening, went out for his usual stroll with the dog. Some feeling of curiosity moved him to go round past the late Mr. Skimmings's house. As he loitered by, glancing up at the blank windows, the garden gate opened and a man came out. In the light of a street lamp, Pender recognized him at once.

"Hullo!" he said.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said the man. "Viewing the site of the tragedy, eh? What do *you* think about it all?"

"Oh, nothing very much," said Pender. "I didn't know him. Odd, our meeting again like this."

"Yes, isn't it? You live near here, I suppose."

"Yes," said Pender; and then wished he hadn't. "Do you live in these parts too?"

"Me?" said the man. "Oh, no. I was only here on a little matter of business."

"Last time we met," said Pender, "you had business at Rugby." They had fallen into step together, and were walking slowly down to the turning Pender had to take in order to reach his house.

"So I had," agreed the other man. "My business takes me all over the country. I never know where I may be wanted next."

"It was while you were at Rugby that old Brittlesea was found dead in his bath, wasn't it?" remarked Pender, carelessly.

"Yes. Funny thing, coincidence." The man glanced up at him sideways through his glittering glasses. "Left all his money

to his wife, didn't he? She's a rich woman now. Good-looking girl—a lot younger than he was."

They were passing Pender's gate. "Come in and have a drink," said Pender, and again immediately regretted the impulse.

The man accepted, and they went into Pender's bachelor study.

"Remarkable lot of these bath-deaths there have been lately, haven't there?" observed Pender carelessly, as he splashed soda into the tumblers.

"You think it's remarkable?" said the man, with his usual irritating trick of querying everything that was said to him. "Well, I don't know. Perhaps it is. But it's a fairly common accident."

"I suppose I've been taking more notice on account of that conversation we had in the train." Pender laughed, a little self-consciously. "It just makes me wonder—you know how one does—whether anybody else had happened to hit on that drug you mentioned—what was its name?"

The man ignored the question.

"Oh, I shouldn't think so," he said. "I fancy I'm the only person who knows about that. I only stumbled on the thing by accident myself when I was looking for something else. I don't imagine it could have been discovered simultaneously in so many parts of the country. But all these verdicts just show, don't they, what a safe way it would be of getting rid of a person."

"You're a chemist, then?" asked Pender, catching at the one phrase which seemed to promise information.

"Oh, I'm a bit of everything. Sort of general utility man. I do a good bit of studying on my own, too. You've got one or two interesting books here, I see."

Pender was flattered. For a man in his position—he had been in a bank until he came into that little bit of money—he felt that he had improved his mind to some purpose, and he knew that his collection of modern first editions would be worth money some day. He went over to the glass-fronted bookcase and pulled out a volume or two to show his visitor.

The man displayed intelligence, and presently joined him in front of the shelves. "These, I take it, represent your personal tastes?" He took down a volume of Henry James and glanced at the fly-leaf. "That your name? E. Pender?"

Pender admitted that it was. "You have the advantage of me," he added.

"Oh! I am one of the great Smith clan," said the other with a laugh, "and work for my bread. You seem to be very nicely fixed here."

Pender explained about the clerkship and the legacy.

"Very nice, isn't it?" said Smith. "Not married? No.

You're one of the lucky ones. Not likely to be needing any sulphate of . . . any useful drugs in the near future. And you never will, if you stick to what you've got and keep off women and speculation."

He smiled up sideways at Pender. Now that his hat was off, Pender saw that he had a quantity of closely curled grey hair, which made him look older than he had appeared in the railway carriage.

"No, I shan't be coming to you for assistance yet awhile," said Pender, laughing. "Besides, how should I find you if I wanted you?"

"You wouldn't have to," said Smith. "*I* should find *you*. There's never any difficulty about that." He grinned, oddly. "Well, I'd better be getting on. Thank you for your hospitality. I don't expect we shall meet again—but we may, of course. Things work out so queerly, don't they?"

When he had gone, Pender returned to his own armchair. He took up his glass of whisky, which stood there nearly full.

"Funny!" he said to himself. "I don't remember pouring that out. I suppose I got interested and did it mechanically." He emptied his glass slowly, thinking about Smith.

What in the world was Smith doing at Skimmings's house?

An odd business altogether. If Skimmings's housekeeper had known about that money . . . But she had not known, and if she had, how could she have found out about Smith and his sulphate of . . . the word had been on the tip of his tongue then.

"You would not need to find me. *I* should find *you*." What had the man meant by that? But this was ridiculous. Smith was not the devil, presumably. But if he really had this secret—if he liked to put a price upon it—nonsense!

"Business at Rugby—a little bit of business at Skimmings's house." Oh, absurd!

"Nobody is fit to be trusted. *Absolute* power over another man's life . . . it grows on you."

Lunacy! And, if there was anything in it, the man was mad to tell Pender about it. If Pender chose to speak he could get the fellow hanged. The very existence of Pender would be dangerous.

That whisky!

More and more, thinking it over, Pender became persuaded that he had never poured it out. Smith must have done it while his back was turned. Why that sudden display of interest in the bookshelves? It had had no connection with anything that had gone before. Now Pender came to think of it, it had been a very stiff whisky. Was it imagination, or had there been something about the flavour of it? A cold sweat broke out on Pender's forehead.

A quarter of an hour later, after a powerful dose of mustard and water, Pender was downstairs again, very cold and shivering,

huddling over the fire. He had had a narrow escape—if he had escaped. He did not know how the stuff worked, but he would not take a hot bath again for some days. One never knew.

Whether the mustard and water had done the trick in time, or whether the hot bath was an essential part of the treatment, at any rate Pender's life was saved for the time being. But he was still uneasy. He kept the front door on the chain and warned his servant to let no strangers into the house.

He ordered two more morning papers and the *News of the World* on Sundays, and kept a careful watch upon their columns. Deaths in baths became an obsession with him. He neglected his first editions and took to attending inquests.

Three weeks later he found himself at Lincoln. A man had died of heart failure in a Turkish bath—a fat man, of sedentary habits. The jury added a rider to their verdict of Misadventure to the effect that the management should exercise a stricter supervision over the bathers and should never permit them to be left unattended in the hot room.

As Pender emerged from the hall he saw ahead of him a shabby hat that seemed familiar. He plunged after it, and caught Mr. Smith about to step into a taxi.

"Smith," he cried, gasping a little. He clutched him fiercely by the shoulder.

"What, you again?" said Smith. "Taking notes of the case, eh? *Can I do anything for you?*"

"You devil!" said Pender. "You're mixed up in this! You tried to kill me the other day."

"Did I? Why should I do that?"

"You'll swing for this," shouted Pender, menacingly.

A policeman pushed his way through the gathering crowd.

"Here," said he, "what's all this about?"

Smith touched his forehead significantly.

"It's all right, officer," said he. "The gentleman seems to think I'm here for no good. Here's my card. The coroner knows me. But he attacked me. You'd better keep an eye on him."

"That's right," said a bystander.

"This man tried to kill me," said Pender.

The policeman nodded. "Don't you worry about that, sir," he said. "You think better of it. The 'eat in there has upset you a bit. All right, *all* right."

"But I want to charge him," said Pender.

"I wouldn't do that if I was you," said the policeman.

"I tell you," said Pender, "that this man Smith has been trying to poison me. He's poisoned scores of people."

The policeman winked at Smith.

" Best be off, sir," he said. " I'll settle this. Now, my lad " —and he held Pender firmly by the arms—" just you keep cool and take it quiet. That gentleman's name ain't Smith nor nothing like it. You've got a bit mixed up like."

" Well, what is his name ? " demanded Pender.

" Never you mind," replied the constable. " You leave him alone, or you'll be getting yourself into trouble."

The taxi had driven away. Pender glanced round at the circle of amused faces and gave in.

" All right, officer," he said. " I won't give you any trouble. I'll come round to the police station and tell you about it."

" What do you think o' that one ? " asked the inspector of the sergeant when Pender had stumbled out of the station.

" Up the pole an' halfway round the flag, if you ask me," replied his subordinate. " Got one o' them ideez fix what they talk about."

" H'm ! " replied the inspector. " Well, we've got his name and address. Better make a note of 'em. He might turn up again. Poisoning people so as they die in their baths, eh ? That's a good 'un. Wonderful how these barmy ones think it all out, isn't it ? "

The spring that year was a bad one—cold and foggy. It was March when Pender went down to an inquest at Deptford, but a thick blanket of mist was hanging over the river as though it were November. The cold ate into your bones. As he sat in the dingy little court, peering through the yellow twilight of gas and fog, he could scarcely see the witnesses as they came to the table. Everybody in the place seemed to be coughing. Pender was coughing too. His bones ached, and he felt as though he were about due for a bout of influenza.

Straining his eyes, he thought he recognized a face on the other side of the room, but the smarting fog which penetrated every crack stung and blinded him. He felt in his overcoat pocket, and his hand closed comfortably on something thick and heavy. Ever since that day in Lincoln he had gone about armed for protection. Not a revolver—he was no hand with firearms. A sandbag was much better. He had bought one from an old man wheeling a barrow.

It was meant for keeping out draughts from the door—a good, old-fashioned affair.

The inevitable verdict was returned. The spectators began to push their way out. Pender had to hurry now, not to lose sight of his man. He elbowed his way along, muttering apologies. At the door he almost touched the man, but a stout woman intervened. He plunged past her, and she gave a little squeak of indignation.

The man in front turned his head, and the light over the door glinted on his glasses.

Pender pulled his hat over his eyes and followed. His shoes had *crêpe* rubber soles and made no sound on the sticky pavement. The man went on, jogging quietly up one street and down another, and never looking back. The fog was so thick that Pender was forced to keep within a few yards of him. Where was he going? Into the lighted streets? Home by bus or tram?

No. He turned off to the left, down a narrow street.

The fog was thicker here. Pender could no longer see his quarry, but he heard the footsteps going on before him at the same even pace. It seemed to him that they two were alone in the world—pursued and pursuer, slayer and avenger. The street began to slope more rapidly. They must be coming out near the river.

Suddenly the dim shapes of the houses fell away on either side. There was an open space with a lamp vaguely visible in the middle. The footsteps paused. Pender, silently hurrying after, saw the man standing close beneath the lamp, apparently consulting something in a notebook.

Four steps and Pender was upon him. He drew the sandbag from his pocket. The man looked up.

"I've got you this time," said Pender, and struck with all his force.

Pender had been quite right. He did get influenza. It was a week before he was out and about again. The weather had changed, and the air was fresh and sweet. In spite of the weakness left by the malady he felt as though a heavy weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He tottered down to a favourite bookshop of his in the Strand, and picked up a D. H. Lawrence "first" at a price which he knew to be a bargain. Encouraged by this, he turned into a small chop-house, chiefly frequented by Fleet Street men, and ordered a grilled cutlet and a half-tankard of bitter.

Two journalists were seated at the next table.

"Going to poor old Buckley's funeral?" asked one.

"Yes," said the other. "Poor devil. Fancy his getting sloshed on the head like that. He must have been on his way down to interview the widow of that fellow who died in a bath. It's a rough district. Probably one of Jimmy the Card's crowd had it in for him. He was a great crime-reporter—they won't get another like Bill Buckley in a hurry."

"He was a decent sort, too. Great old sport. No end of a leg-puller. Remember his great stunt about sulphate of thanatol?"

Pender started. *That* was the word that had eluded him for so many months. A curious dizziness came over him and he took a pull at the tankard to steady himself.

" . . . looking at you as sober as a judge," the journalist was saying. " He used to work off that wheeze on poor boobs in railway carriages to see how they'd take it. Would you believe that one chap actually offered him—"

" Hullo ! " interrupted his friend. " The bloke over there has fainted. I thought he was looking a bit white."

* * *

ALL PRESENT AND CORRECT

I am reminded of the ingenuity of a friend of mine, William by name, who arrived at a large country house for Christmas without any present in his bag . . . To his horror he discovered that everybody was preparing a Christmas present for him, and that it was taken for granted that he would require a little privacy and brown paper on Christmas Eve for the purpose of addressing his own offerings to others. He had wild thoughts of telegraphing to London for something to be sent down, and spoke to other members of the house-party in order to discover what sort of presents would be suitable.

" What are you giving our host ? " he asked one of them.

" Mary and I are giving him a book," said John . . .

William then approached the youngest son of the house, and discovered that he and his next brother Dick were sharing in this and that. William retired to his room and thought profoundly.

He was the first down to breakfast on Christmas morning. All the places at the table were piled high with presents. He looked at John's place. The top parcel said, " To John and Mary from Charles." William took out his fountain-pen and added a couple of words to the inscription. It then read, " To John and Mary from Charles and William," and in William's opinion looked just as effective as before. He moved on to the next place. " To Angela from Father," said the top parcel. " And William," wrote William. At his hostess' place he hesitated for a moment. The first present there was for " Darling Mother, from her loving children." It did not seem that an " and William " was quite suitable. But his hostess was not to be deprived of William's kindly thought; twenty seconds later the handkerchiefs " from John and Mary and William " expressed all the nice things which he was feeling for her. He passed on to the next place.

It is, of course, impossible to thank every donor of a joint gift; one simply thanks the first person whose eye one happens to catch. Sometimes William's eye was caught, sometimes not . . . I can recommend his solution of the problem with perfect confidence to those who may be in a similar predicament next Christmas.

A. A. MILNE, *If I May*

Argosy Proudly Presents:

PATH TO GLORY

by SHOWELL STYLES

"*IF a ray of light suffer double reflection, then the angle between the said ray and its reflection will be the double of the angle—*"

The undersized young man sighed deeply, ran thin fingers through untidy hair, shifted the candle an inch nearer to his book, and began to read the sentence again. Outside in the streets and alleys of Portsmouth town the sou'-wester bullied and hallooed its uproarious way round corner and gable and chimney-pot with a violence unusual on an April night. Inside, with the glow of fire-light lending a rosier hue to the pale radiance cast by the candle on open book and thin, frowning face, the little parlour of the Dolphin Inn had the air of a scholar's retreat, a snug study apart from the hurly-burly of the world.

"*If a ray of light suffer double reflection then the angle . . . If a ray of light—*"

With a grunt of impatience the student slammed the covers of Captain Tampion's treatise on the Sextant together. The words were plain enough, but his mind refused to attach any meaning to them. That wasting disease which had so nearly been the end of him in the East Indies had left him slow to profit by the printed word, he supposed.

He reached for the tattered copy of the *Morning Post* which the landlord had brought to him when his supper had been cleared away. It was dated 30th March 1777—three days ago—and the paragraph first to catch his eye informed him, in smudgy print, that the latest intelligence from America left no doubt that the spring campaign of General Howe would swiftly complete the subjugation of the rebellious colonists. He flung the paper aside and, pushing back his chair, went to the fireplace and stood with an arm on the oaken mantelpiece staring into the flames. The red flickering light illumined a thin and unprepossessing face, the nose prominent and bulbous at the tip, the lower lip fleshy and out-jutting. His lank unpowdered hair hung untidily over a scowling brow. Only his eyes were remarkable; they held a fire that was more than a reflection of the glowing coals.

His thoughts were running six days ahead, to that grave board of admirals and captains before whom he must prove his qualifica-

tions for promotion to a lieutenancy. Would they be satisfied with his proved seamanship—in the Arctic under Phipps, in the East Indies under Hughes—and his acting-lieutenancy? Or would they subject him to a searching examination on the theory of sextants and the art of naval gunnery? This damned theoretical business was the devil. If an officer knew enough to take his ship board-and-board with the enemy, and that by the exercise of practical seamanship, he surely knew as much as was needed. Tactics, the instant decision at a *coup d'œil*, were not to be learned from text-books . . .

From somewhere, in the tap probably, came a faint sound of men's voices raised in a stave of song:

She'd a dark an' a rollin' eye,
An' her skirts triced up so high,
With a tow, row, row—

The rising bellow of the wind outside drowned the rest. The young man seemed to cock an ear to the wind's voice; as though the wild song it ranted was more to his taste than the ditty of the tap-room.

He moved to the red-curtained window, his thin shanks in their white stockings and breeches straddling a little with the gait of one accustomed to an unsteady footing, his old brown cut-away coat hanging loosely on a body thin almost to fragility. He pulled aside the curtain and pressed his nose against the pane, peering aimlessly into the darkness. Then he fumbled impatiently at the catch and flung the casement wide, admitting the roistering night to the little room and extinguishing the candle on the table behind him with the instant entry of the wind. He thrust out his head and gulped the salt-scented air eagerly.

The window of the parlour opened not on to the High Street but upon a narrow alley that ran along the side of the inn. It was empty of people, but from a little distance away came the noise of turbulent humans—hoarse shouts, a woman's scream, a rasped command. Nothing in such sounds, in Portsmouth town after dark, to disturb a listener; a press-gang at work, a drunken quarrel—with gin at a penny a glass what would one expect?—were common enough in a seaport. A curl of distaste twisted the young man's rather full lips. How long, how long before he would be at sea again, with the human passions round him chained in by a stern discipline until they could be unleashed upon a foe? He was closing the casement again when another sound, heard in a lull of the gale, arrested his hand, the *clap-clop-clap* of running footsteps.

The runner was coming down the alley, stumbling on the wet

cobbles. As he came nearer the listener at the window heard the sobbing of his breath, a squeaky and juvenile sound. The footsteps slowed as they approached the window—perhaps the runner had seen the dim shape of the open casement. He came uncertainly to a halt, an arm's length from the man inside the room ; a diminutive figure enveloped in a long cloak who—unaware of scrutiny—appeared to look fearfully over his shoulder at the dark alley behind him.

Out of the darkness a huge and horrible voice bellowed : " Mister Smith ! Mis-ter Sm-i-ith ! "

The small cloaked figure took a hurried step forward ; seemed to notice the open window and changed direction towards it ; discovered the watcher in the room. Instantly he was close under the sill, hands hooked over it and the white blob of his face pleadingly upturned.

" Let me climb in, sir—please let me ! I'll not go back ! "

It was the voice of a boy, with the comical croak of approaching adolescence. It was tremulous with something more than fear—with disgust, or anger. The man, without a word, reached one arm through the window, pushing wide the casement with the other. A heave and a scuffle, and the parlour had two occupants instead of one.

The young man closed the window swiftly and drew the curtain. Then, still without speaking, he tore a strip from the *Morning Post* and with it conveyed flame from fire to candle. As he flung the charred paper into the fireplace a clatter of heavy steps went past the window and died away round the corner into the High Street. He turned and surveyed his visitor, who stood leaning against the table with hands pressed flat upon it.

He saw a boy in a blue boat-cloak, a sturdy youngster whose round face was pale and set, whose wide stubborn mouth was tight-compressed and yet trembling a little. He was hatless, and from his damp brown curls a crimson stain ran across brow and cheek.

" You are hurt," exclaimed the young man ; his voice was both high pitched and husky.

" No," returned the boy quickly. " It's wine. He—he threw the bottle." He glanced up, shame and obstinacy in his troubled brown eyes. " I'll not go back," he said again.

" Sit down," said the other, pointing to a battered easy chair on one side of the hearth. His swift glance noted, as the boy obeyed after a momentary hesitation, that beneath the boat-cloak were stout buckled shoes, wide-bottomed canvas trousers, a jacket of blue cloth tightly buttoned.

" From a King's ship ? " he said abruptly.

The boy opened his lips. A lie, it was plain, trembled there. His questioner turned away and drew the other chair from the table. When he had set it by the hearth, opposite the boy, and sat down with thin fingers locked about his knee, he levelled those glowing eyes of his at the youthful and irresolute face before him.

The boy suddenly threw back his head with a strangely arrogant gesture.

" I am from a King's ship," he declared. " But damn me if I go back to her ! "

" Hum. Mr.—Smith, I think ? "

" Mr. Midshipman Smith, sir," amended the boy. " William Sidney Smith," he added, with a certain pompousness that sat oddly on one so young.

The young man did not relax the severity of his features, and his voice was cold.

" And why, Mr. Smith, will you not return to your ship ? "

Mr. Midshipman Smith leaned forward and thumped a fist on his knee. Angry colour rushed into his face.

" Because the Navy's no place for a gentleman, sir—that's why ! Eighteen months I've served, and I hope I've done my duty. But to make me a common tipstaff—to send me lubber-catching "—his voice cracked ridiculously—" it's a beastly, loutish game, damn me if it ain't ! "

" No place for a gentleman," repeated the young man musingly. " I'm sorry for it, Mr. Smith. I have had the honour to serve with His Majesty's Navy for seven years."

Mr. Midshipman Smith's round cheeks went very red indeed. He shrank back into his chair, biting his underlip, the picture of a small boy in desperate trouble.

" How old are you, Mr. Smith ? " inquired that high, cold voice.

" Nearly thirteen—sir."

The words came with difficulty. The young man saw that his visitor was not far from tears. Nearly thirteen . . . He himself was only six years older. He could remember well the discomforts, the degrading revelations and inward struggles, that had attended him as a boy of twelve in the *Raisonnable ;* he recalled the fierce hatred he had conceived, then, for the King's service—a hatred that had only died in the discovery that it had given him, frail and sensitive as he was, the will and the power to rise above every weakness of body and spirit. When he spoke again his voice was more kindly.

" I am to understand, I think, Mr. Smith, that you are ashore with a party of seamen to press men for the Service. It's a necessary work—but unpleasant. Like many another task in the Navy."

He paused. The boy remained silent, clutching the arms of his chair in the effort of self-control.

" You've served long enough, lad, to know what happens to pressed men, aye, and volunteers, too. You've seen them flogged and hammered into a ship's company. You've seen them made into men despite themselves—and more than men. Seamen, Mr. Smith, such as no other nation on earth can make. Men built for victory." A deeper tone had crept into the speaker's voice. " You'll see such men live where your toughest landsman would die. You'll see them follow wherever you're man enough to lead. You'll—"

" I'll not go back," interrupted the boy sullenly. He snuffled a little. The young man pulled a large linen handkerchief from his pocket and tossed it to him.

" You'd best wipe the wine from your face," he observed. And added, casually, " The fellow put up a fight, I suppose ? "

The boy, with a mumbled word of thanks, wiped his face and returned the handkerchief. He gulped, hesitated, and launched unwillingly upon his tale, gathering confidence as it proceeded. He had been sent in charge of the gig, with Horder the boatswain and eight men, to press men for a crew depleted by sickness. Horder had led the way to a low tavern in the side streets of Portsmouth. There had been women there—awful women—and men both drunk and sober.

All the men had fled except two, one of whom was too drunk to stand and the other drunk enough to struggle with Fate itself. It was this latter, a hulk of a man, who had flung the wine-bottle whose contents had splashed the watching midshipman, and then had lashed out with fists and feet. With unhesitating efficiency the seamen had used their cudgels. Their future messmate had been battered into unconsciousness, a bloody and broken wreck. Physically sick with the blood and brutality, Midshipman Smith had crept out unseen, and—the gale blowing his disgust into desperate action —had bolted down the alley. It had been Horder's voice that had shouted after him. And—

" I'll not go back," he finished obstinately.

The young man, elbow on knee and chin on hand, regarded his companion for a long moment. Then he turned and stared into the fire, seeming to forget that he was not alone. The boy watched him sullenly. After a while he began to speak, addressing, it appeared, the glowing heart of the coals.

Long afterwards the boy was to remember the little parlour at the Dolphin Inn ; the ruddy, flickering light, the pungent smell of the unsnuffed candle, the high voice talking quietly against the muffled noises of the gale. He listened at first unwillingly, as a

boy will who thinks he is being admonished. But in a little while his embarrassed wriggling ceased. Some phrase—or it may have been something unspoken—caught at his soul like a grapnel and drew him, as it were, alongside the mind of the speaker.

" Injustice," said the young man slowly to the fire. " Brutality. There'll be no need for them some day—we'll have a navy in which men will be eager to serve. Meanwhile we build on them because we must build. Only England is strong enough to keep free the seas. Ships she must have and crews to man them—if we've to cudgel and cheat men into the Service. God knows it shouldn't be necessary. God knows the need for it now."

He paused, jutting out his lower lip at the coals. A gust of wind whirled in the chimney, drawing up a volley of sparks.

" It's not for us to reason," he went on more quickly. " Ours to lead, to know our duty and to do it. You and I have taken service in a hard school—to flinch is to be proved unfit for it. The poor fellows we drag from their wenches and gin-soaking are unfit for it, until we've made them into men by force. You and I are gentlemen, Mr. Smith. That means that the love of honour and our country's service is already implanted in us. Duty ? Isn't it every man's duty to order his life so that he fears nothing but God ? Doesn't every religion, every philosophy, teach that ? Where will you find a better chance of performing that duty than in the Service ? "

He stood up abruptly. The noise as he pushed back his chair made the boy who listened, open-mouthed, start. The young man began to pace restlessly up and down, his thin shadow crossing and re-crossing the red curtain of the window. His eyes glowed as though they had taken flame from the fire. Words fell from his lips like sparks from a wind-blown coal.

" Do you think I haven't wished myself overboard many a time —I with this feeble body that faints and denies my will ? Yet I wouldn't change with any man, saint or statesman or soldier. I've placed myself, by God's grace, where I can best serve my king by being the foremost whenever glory and honour are to be won.

" They'll tell you that glory and honour are idle words, Mr. Smith—that chivalry is outmoded. I tell you that in all the world today there's no straighter path to glory than the sea-path ! I tell you that honour waits for the seaman—that chivalry has changed saddle and spear for the quarter-deck of a ship of the line ! To serve his country—does all history show a finer trade for any man, gentle or simple ? You've but to play the man, and your course is set for glory—aye, even in a ship manned from the stews and the gaols. It is yours to live, in this money-grubbing age, as the knights of chivalry lived, seeking danger to match your spirit against it."

He halted in his pacing and suddenly shot out an arm, pointing at the boy in the easy chair. His lean face was alight, smiling.

"*By heaven, sir, there's no other life for a gentleman!*"

Mr. Midshipman Smith made no reply. He sat at gaze, mouth slightly open, motionless. The young man dropped his arm and the light went out of his face. He drew a long breath.

"You've lost your hat, I think, sir," he said, and his voice was once more cold and rather toneless. "Mine, I fear, will not fit you."

The boy came to life. He stood up—barely six inches shorter than the other. He stood very erect.

"Thank you, sir," he said, stubborn chin uptilted. "I've another on board."

The young man nodded shortly. "Your boat will have waited?"

"I can take a cockboat from the Dockyard Steps. And—and, sir—I'll not forget."

The other nodded again. "It would be best, perhaps, if you left by the window." He flung wide the casement, letting in the salt breath of the gale, and held out his hand. "Good night, Mr. Smith."

The boy gripped the thin fingers tightly, turned and scrambled out into the darkness. From the level of the sill his round face looked up at the man in the room.

"I—you didn't tell me your name, sir," he said a trifle shyly.

The young man paused in the act of closing the window.

"Horatio Nelson," he replied. And, having shut out the noise of the wind and the firm beat of retreating footsteps, returned to Captain Tampion's treatise on the Sextant.

★*But this, of course, is only the Prologue, the beginning of the many adventures and grim hazards in store for Mr. Midshipman Smith in His Majesty's Navy.*

Next month our young hero, now Second Lieutenant aboard the Alcide *frigate awaits his first fierce battle at sea. Nor is he (nor the reader) to be disappointed; for Admiral Rodney is manœuvring his fleet to engage the superior French force off the West Indies. And here is opportunity enough for Smith to distinguish himself both in the hard critical eyes of his Captain and in the more tender but mocking regard of Isabelle Laroche, the dark, elusive and provocative French girl whom he is seeking to win from his rival in love and war.*

EVER NEW DELIGHT . . .

Straight Mine Eye—

The rose is a rose
And was always a rose,
But the theory now goes
That the apple's a rose
And the pear is, and so's
The plum I suppose.
The dear only knows
What will next prove a rose.
You of course are a rose—
But were always a rose.

ROBERT FROST

Hath Caught New Pleasures . . .

It was nearly eleven that night when Ashurst put down the pocket Odyssey which for half an hour he had held in his hands without reading, and slipped through the yard down to the orchard. The moon had just risen, very golden, over the hill, and like a bright powerful, watching spirit peered through the bars of an ash tree's half-naked boughs. In among the apple trees it was still dark, and he stood making sure of his direction . . . He moved on through the thicket of stems and boughs covered with that live powdering whiteness, till he reached the big apple tree . . .

Under the thick branches he stood still again, to listen. The same sounds exactly, and a faint grunting from the sleepy pigs . . . Would she come—would she? And among these quivering, haunted, moon-witched trees he was seized with doubts of everything! All was unearthly here, fit for no earthly lovers; fit only for god and goddess, faun and nymph—not for him and this little country girl . . .

Then suddenly he heard the gate close, the pigs stirring again and grunting; and leaning against the trunk, he pressed his hands to its mossy sides behind him, and held his breath. She might have been a spirit threading the trees, for all the noise she made! Then he saw her quite close—her dark form part of a little tree, her white face part of its blossom; so still and peering towards him. He whispered: "Megan!" and held out his hands. She ran forward, straight to his breast. When he felt her heart beating against him, Ashurst knew to the full the sensations of chivalry and passion.

Because she was not of his world, because she was so simple and young and headlong, adoring and defenceless, how could he be

other than her protector, in the dark ? Because she was all simple, loving nature and beauty, as much a part of this spring night as was the living blossom, how should he not take all that she would give him—how not fulfil the spring in her heart and his ? And torn between these two emotions he clasped her close . . .

JOHN GALSWORTHY, 1867–1933, *The Apple Tree*

With Store—

You are the octave that my fingers spanned,
Within whose range the whole of music lies ;
You are the window open to the skies
Through which my senses like a wind were fanned ;
You are the castle in the air I planned
And peopled with my coloured fantasies.
I see you in my mind as with my eyes,
I hold you in my heart as in my hand.

You are the molten metal in the mould
Of my most secret dreams which give you shape,
From whose matrix your image shall unfold
And stand without the power to escape :
Your golden body, furnaced in my breast,
Cast, and for ever perfectly possessed.

F. C. FENTON

Of Ladies—

She came in with a formality, and Nicholas knew at once that she was not going to lose it for the rest of the evening. That meant she was conscious. And she wore a conscious dress. It looked some kind of Spanish affair, and from the waist down was only black lace over a Castilian pink underskirt through which vaguely, her legs were silhouetted against the glow of the fire. Nicholas realized that this was a very subtle dress. It was formal and chaste enough for an Ambassadorial dinner, and yet as tantalising as something one wore in a bedroom.

Nicholas had a feeling that he wanted to get to know this woman. When she turned on the rug she gave just a slight swing to her frock and her legs suggested themselves in the firelight. She knew perfectly well they did, he was certain . . .

How the devil had she got out of herself and gone into this new woman ? What did she intend ? He had vaguely proposed to himself that he was going to invent work and retire to the fire in the library after dinner . . . But . . . he knew that he must share it with her. No sane man was going to leave a woman like this . . .

VIVIAN CONNELL, *The Chinese Room*

Whose Bright Eyes—

And then one day the Thing happened . . . Piggott was sitting in the girl's tent pointing pinthorns with his knife. Eldorai, a charming barbaric figure, with coral necklet and half-guinea pieces braided in her hair, crouched by the fire, her slim bare legs tucked under her. Lazily and happily he watched her kneading a little flour into dough . . . Suddenly the young girl said, " I want some of your blood." " Splendidly dramatic," thought Piggott, " this is, no doubt, the prelude to a vampire myth picked up five centuries ago, when her ancestors sojourned in the Balkans. However, a young and pretty vampire must be treated with the respect due to a lady . . ."

And then Eldorai, with her eyes fixed upon his, had rolled up his sleeve. And before he had time to realize what was happening, he felt himself stabbed in the fore-arm by some pointed instrument, doubtless one of the pinthorns of his own fashioning. The blood flowed. In a moment she had stanched it with the dough. He saw that it made a small scarlet blot on the paste. Then, though more deliberately, she had bared her shapely brown arm, and repeated this strange rite on her own person. Absorbed as an anthropologist observing for the first time some savage ceremony, Piggott watched her re-knead the dough in which their blood was now mingled, fashion it into a thin flat cake, and place it on the red ashes . . .

In a few minutes the *marikli* was baked. Breaking it into two pieces, Eldorai took one herself and handed the other to Piggott, gazing intently into his eyes.

And Piggott, following her example, had eaten it. That was the incredible part of it. How he, delicate-minded and fastidious as he was, could ever have done so he was afterwards at a loss to comprehend. He could only come to the conclusion that he had been hypnotised by the girl . . . It was not until the next morning, when he recalled the occurrence with a shudder, that he felt as though he had taken part in the celebration of some sacrilegious Black Mass.

Piggott remembered the words that Eldorai had spoken to him with such extraordinary gravity : " And now, Stephen, you belongs to me and I belongs to you : and I will come for you, my rom, to the day, no matter wheresoever I be, even if I has to wait until the seven years is out."

DR. JOHN SAMPSON, 1862–1931, *The Wedding—a Gypsy Tale*

—Rain Influence

I behold thy bosom opened to my view, and I say " Lo ! it is day."

Fragment from a Tchinghiané love song

JUG OF SILVER

In that tense moment on Christmas Eve we waited for the answer

by TRUMAN CAPOTE

AFTER school I used to work in the Valhalla drugstore. It was owned by my uncle, Mr. Ed Marshall. I call him Mr. Marshall because everybody, including his wife, called him Mr. Marshall. Nevertheless he was a nice man.

This drugstore was maybe old-fashioned, but it was large and dark and cool: during summer months there was no pleasanter place in town. At the left, as you entered, was a tobacco-magazine counter behind which, as a rule, sat Mr. Marshall: a squat, square-faced, pink-fleshed man with looping, manly, white moustaches. Beyond this counter stood the beautiful soda fountain. It was very antique and made of fine, yellowed marble, smooth to the touch but without a trace of cheap glaze. Mr. Marshall bought it at an auction in New Orleans in 1910 and was plainly proud of it.

When you sat on the high, delicate stools and looked across the fountain you could see yourself reflected softly, as though by candle-light, in a row of ancient, mahogany-framed mirrors. All general merchandise was displayed in glass-doored, curio-like cabinets that were locked with brass keys. There was always in the air the smell of syrup and nutmeg and other delicacies.

The Valhalla was the gathering place of Wachata County till a certain Rufus McPherson came to town and opened a second drug-store directly across the court-house square. This old Rufus McPherson was a villain; that is, he took away my uncle's trade. He installed fancy equipment such as electric fans and coloured lights; he provided kerb service and made grilled-cheese sandwiches to order. Naturally, though some remained devoted to Mr. Marshall, most folks couldn't resist Rufus McPherson.

For a while, Mr. Marshall chose to ignore him: if you were to mention McPherson's name he would sort of snort, finger his moustaches and look the other way. But you could tell he was mad. And getting madder. Then one day towards the middle of October I strolled into the Valhalla to find him sitting at the fountain playing dominoes and drinking wine with Hamurabi.

Hamurabi was an Egyptian and some kind of dentist, though he

didn't do much business as the people hereabouts have unusually strong teeth, due to an element in the water. He spent a great deal of his time loafing round the Valhalla and was my uncle's chief buddy. He was a handsome figure of a man, this Hamurabi, being dark-skinned and nearly seven feet tall; the matrons of the town kept their daughters under lock and key and gave him the eye themselves. He had no foreign accent whatsoever, and it was always my opinion that he wasn't any more Egyptian than the man in the moon.

Anyway, there they were swigging red Italian wine from a gallon jug. It was a troubling sight, for Mr. Marshall was a renowned teetotaller. So naturally, I thought: Oh, golly, Rufus McPherson has finally got his goat. That was not the case, however.

"Here, son," said Mr. Marshall, "come have a glass of wine."

"Sure," said Hamurabi, "help us finish it up. We can't waste it."

Much later, when the jug was dry, Mr. Marshall picked it up and said, "Now we shall see!" And with that disappeared out into the afternoon.

"Where's he off to?" I asked.

"Ah," was all Hamurabi would say. He liked to devil me.

A half-hour passed before my uncle returned. He was stooped and grunting under the load he carried. He set the jug atop the fountain and stepped back, smiling and rubbing his hands together. "Well, what do you think?"

"Ah," purred Hamurabi.

"Gee . . ." I said.

It was the same wine jug, God knows, but there was a wonderful difference; for now it was crammed to the brim with nickels and dimes that shone dully through the thick glass.

"Pretty, eh?" said my uncle. "Had it filled over at the First National. Couldn't get in anything bigger-sized than a nickel. Still, there's lotsa money in there, let me tell you."

"But what's the point, Mr. Marshall?" I said. "I mean, what's the idea?"

Mr. Marshall's smile deepened to a grin. "This here's a jug of silver, you might say . . ."

"The pot at the end of the rainbow," interrupted Hamurabi.

". . . and the idea, as you call it, is for folks to guess how much money is in there. For instance, say you buy a quarter's worth of stuff—well, then you get to take a chance. The more you buy, the more chances you get. And I'll keep all guesses in a ledger till Christmas Eve, at which time whoever comes closest to the right amount will get the whole shebang."

Hamurabi nodded solemnly. "He's playing Santa Claus—a

mighty crafty Santa Claus," he said. " I'm going home to write a book : *The Skilful Murder of Rufus McPherson.*" To tell the truth, he sometimes did write stories and send them out to the magazines. They always came back.

It was surprising, really like a miracle, how Wachata County took to the jug. Why, the Valhalla hadn't done so much business since Station Master Tully, poor soul, went stark raving mad and claimed to have discovered oil behind the depot, causing the town to be overrun with wildcat prospectors. Even the pool-hall bums who never spent a cent on anything not connected with whisky or women took to investing their spare cash in milk shakes. A few elderly ladies publicly disapproved of Mr. Marshall's enterprise as a kind of gambling, but they didn't start any trouble and some even found occasion to visit us and hazard a guess. The school kids were crazy about the whole thing, and I was very popular because they figured I knew the answer.

" I'll tell you why all this is," said Hamurabi, lighting one of the Egyptian cigarettes he bought by mail from a concern in New York City. " It's not for the reason you may imagine ; not, in other words, avidity. No. It's the mystery that's enchanting. Now you look at those nickels and dimes and what do you think : ah, *so* much ! No, no. You think : ah, *how* much ? And that's a profound question, indeed. It can mean different things to different people. Understand ? "

And oh, was Rufus McPherson wild ! When you're in trade, you count on Christmas to make up a large share of your yearly profit, and he was hard pressed to find a customer. So he tried to imitate the jug ; but being such a stingy man he filled his with pennies. He also wrote a letter to the editor of *The Banner*, our weekly paper, in which he said that Mr. Marshall ought to be " tarred and feathered and strung up for turning innocent little children into confirmed gamblers and sending them down the path to Hell ! " You can imagine what kind of laughing-stock he was. Nobody had anything for McPherson but scorn. And so by the middle of November he just stood on the sidewalk outside his store and gazed bitterly at the festivities across the square.

At about this time Appleseed and sister made their first appearance.

He was a stranger in town. At least no one could recall ever having seen him before. He said he lived on a farm a mile past Indian Branches ; told us his mother weighed only seventy-four pounds and that he had an older brother who would play the fiddle at anybody's wedding for fifty cents. He claimed that Applesced

was the only name he had and that he was twelve years old. But his sister, Middy, said he was eight. His hair was straight and dark yellow. He had a tight, weather-tanned little face with anxious green eyes that had a very wise and knowing look. He was small and puny and high-strung; and he wore always the same outfit: a red sweater, blue denim breeches and a pair of man-sized boots that went clop-clop with every step.

It was raining that first time he came into the Valhalla; his hair was plastered round his head like a cap and his boots were caked with red mud from the country roads. Middy trailed behind as he swaggered up to the fountain where I was wiping some glasses.

"I hear tell you folks got a bottle fulla money you fixin' to give 'way," he said, looking me square in the eye. "Seein' as you-all are givin' it away, we'd be obliged iffen you'd give it to us. Name's Appleseed, and this here's my sister, Middy."

Middy was a sad, sad-looking kid. She was a good bit taller and older-looking than her brother: a regular bean pole. She had tow-coloured hair that was chopped short, and a pale pitiful little face. She wore a faded cotton dress that came way up above her bony knees. There was something wrong with her teeth, and she tried to conceal this by keeping her lips primly pursed like an old lady.

"Sorry," I said, "but you'll have to talk with Mr. Marshall."

So sure enough he did. I could hear my uncle explaining what he would have to do to win the jug. Appleseed listened attentively, nodding now and then. Presently he came back and stood in front of the jug and, touching it lightly with his hand, said, "Ain't it a pretty thing, Middy?"

Middy said, "Is they gonna give it to us?"

"Naw. What you gotta do, you gotta guess how much money's inside there. And you gotta buy two bits' worth so's even to get a chance."

"Huh, we ain't got no two bits. Where you 'spec we gonna get us two bits?"

Appleseed frowned and rubbed his chin. "That'll be the easy part, just leave it to me. The only worrisome thing is: I can't just take a chance and guess . . . I gotta *know*."

Well, a few days later they showed up again. Appleseed perched on a stool at the fountain and boldly asked for two glasses of water, one for him and one for Middy. It was on this occasion that he gave out the information about his family: ". . . then there's Papa Daddy, that's my mama's papa, who's a Cajun, an' on accounta that he don't speak English good. My brother, the one what plays the fiddle, he's been in jail three times . . . It's on accounta him we had to pick up and leave Louisiana. He cut a fella bad in a razor

fight over a woman ten years older'n him. She had yellow hair."

Middy, lingering in the background, said nervously, "You oughtn't to be tellin' our personal private fam'ly business thataway, Appleseed."

"Hush now, Middy," he said, and she hushed. "She's a good little gal," he added, turning to pat her head, "but you can't let her get away with much. You go look at the picture books, honey, and stop frettin' with your teeth. Appleseed here's got some figurin' to do."

This figuring meant staring hard at the jug, as if his eyes were trying to eat it up. With his chin cupped in his hand, he studied it for a long period, not batting his eyelids once. "A lady in Louisiana told me I could see things other folks couldn't see 'cause I was born with a caul on my head."

"It's a cinch you aren't going to see how much there is," I told him. "Why don't you just let a number pop into your head, and maybe that'll be the right one."

"Uh, uh," he said, "too darn risky. Me, I can't take no sucha chance. Now, the way I got it figured, there ain't but one sure-fire thing and that's to count every nickel and dime."

"Count!"

"Count what?" asked Hamurabi, who had just moseyed inside and was settling himself at the fountain.

"This kid says he's going to count how much is in the jug," I explained.

Hamurabi looked at Appleseed with interest. "How do you plan to do that, son?"

"Oh, by countin'," said Appleseed matter-of-factly.

Hamurabi laughed. "You better have X-ray eyes, son, that's all I can say."

"Oh, no. All you gotta do is be born with a caul on your head. A lady in Louisiana told me so. She was a witch; she loved me and when my ma wouldn't give me to her she put a hex on her and now my ma don't weigh but seventy-four pounds."

"Ve-ry in-ter-esting," was Hamurabi's comment as he gave Appleseed a queer glance.

Middy sauntered up, clutching a copy of *Screen Secrets*. She pointed out a certain photo to Appleseed and said: "Ain't she the nicest-looking lady? Now you see, Appleseed, you see how pretty her teeth are? Not a one outa joint."

"Well, don't you fret none," he said.

After they left Hamurabi ordered a bottle of coca-cola and drank it slowly, while smoking a cigarette. "Do you think maybe that kid's okay upstairs?" he asked presently in a puzzled voice.

Small towns are best for spending Christmas, I think. They

catch the mood quicker and change and come alive under its spell. By the first week in December house doors were decorated with wreaths, and store windows were flashy with red paper bells and snowflakes of glittering isinglass. The kids hiked out into the woods and came back dragging spicy evergreen trees. Already the women were busy baking fruitcakes, unsealing jars of mincemeat and opening bottles of blackberry wine. In the court-house square a huge tree was trimmed with silver tinsel and coloured electric bulbs that were lighted up at sunset. Late of an afternoon you could hear the choir in the Presbyterian church practising carols. All over town the japonicas were in full bloom.

The only person who appeared not the least touched by this heartwarming atmosphere was Appleseed. He went about his declared business of counting the jug money with great, persistent care. Every day now he came to the Valhalla and concentrated on the jug, scowling and mumbling to himself. At first we were all fascinated, but after a while it got tiresome and nobody paid him any mind whatsoever. He never bought anything, apparently having never been able to raise the two bits. Sometimes he'd talk to Hamurabi, who had taken a tender interest in him and occasionally stood treat to a jawbreaker.

" Do you still think he's nuts ? " I asked.

" I'm not so sure," said Hamurabi. " But I'll let you know. He doesn't eat enough. I'm going to take him over to the Rainbow Café and buy him a plate of barbecue."

" He'd appreciate it more if you'd give him a quarter."

" No. A dish of barbecue is what he needs. Besides, it would be better if he never was to make a guess. A high-strung kid like that, so unusual, I wouldn't want to be the one responsible if he lost. Say, it would be pitiful."

I'll admit that at the time Appleseed struck me as being just funny. Mr. Marshall felt sorry for him, and the kids tried to tease him, but had to give it up when he refused to respond. There you could see him plain as day sitting at the fountain with his forehead puckered and his eyes fixed for ever on that jug. Yet he was so withdrawn you sometimes had this awful creepy feeling that, well, maybe he didn't exist. And when you were pretty much convinced of this he'd wake up and say something like, " You know, I hope a 1913 buffalo nickel's in there. A fella was tellin' me he saw where a 1913 buffalo nickel's worth fifty dollars." Or, " Middy's gonna be a big lady in the picture shows. They makes lotsa money, the ladies in the picture shows do, and then we ain't gonna never eat another turnip green as long as we live. Only Middy says she can't be in the picture shows 'less her teeth look good."

Middy didn't always tag along with her brother. On those

occasions when she didn't come, Appleseed wasn't himself; he acted shy and left soon.

Hamurabi kept his promise and stood treat to a dish of barbecue at the café. "Mr. Hamurabi's nice, all right," said Appleseed afterwards, "but he's got peculiar notions: has a notion that if he lived in this place named Egypt he'd be a king or somethin'."

And Hamurabi said, "That kid has the most touching faith. It's a beautiful thing to see. But I'm beginning to despise the whole business." He gestured towards the jug. "Hope of this kind is a cruel thing to give anybody, and I'm damned sorry I was ever a party to it."

Around the Valhalla the most popular pastime was deciding what you would buy if you won the jug. Among those who participated were: Solomon Katz, Phoebe Jones, Carl Kuhnhardt, Puly Simmons, Addie Foxcroft, Marvin Finkle, Trudy Edwards and a coloured man named Erskine Washington. And these were some of their answers: a new outfit and a permanent wave, a second-hand piano, a Shetland pony, a gold bracelet, a set of *Rover Boys* books and a life insurance policy.

Once Mr. Marshall asked Appleseed what he would get. "It's a secret," was the reply, and no amount of prying could make him tell. We took it for granted that whatever it was, he wanted it real bad.

Honest winter, as a rule, doesn't settle on our part of the country till late January, and then is mild, lasting only a short time. But in the year of which I write we were blessed with a singular cold spell the week before Christmas. Some still talk of it, for it was so terrible: water pipes froze solid; many folks had to spend the days in bed snuggled under their quilts, having neglected to lay in enough kindling for the fireplace; the sky turned that strange dull grey as it does just before a storm, and the sun was pale as a waning moon. There was a sharp wind: the old dried-up leaves of last autumn fell on the icy ground, and the evergreen tree in the court-house square was twice stripped of its Christmas finery. When you breathed, your breath made smoky clouds.

Down by the silk mill where the very poor people lived, the families huddled together in the dark at night and told tales to keep their minds off the cold. Out in the country the farmers covered their delicate plants with gunny sacks and prayed; some took advantage of the weather to slaughter their hogs and bring the fresh sausage to town. Mr. R. C. Judkins, our town drunk, outfitted himself in a red cheese-cloth suit and played Santa Claus at the five 'n' dime. Mr. R. C. Judkins was the father of a big family, so everybody was happy to see him sober enough to earn a dollar.

There were several church socials, at one of which Mr. Marshall came face to face with Rufus McPherson: bitter words were passed but not a blow was struck.

Now, as has been mentioned, Appleseed lived on a farm a mile below Indian Branches; this would be approximately three miles from town; a mighty long and lonesome walk. Still, despite the cold, he came every day to the Valhalla and stayed till closing time, which, as the days had grown short, was after nightfall. Once in a while he'd catch a ride part-way home with the foreman from the silk mill, but not often. He looked tired, and there were worry lines about his mouth. He was always cold and shivered a lot. I don't think he wore any warm drawers underneath his red sweater and blue breeches.

It was three days before Christmas when out of the clear sky, he announced: "Well, I'm finished. I mean I know how much is in the bottle." He claimed this with such grave, solemn sureness it was hard to doubt him.

"Why, say now, son, hold on," said Hamurabi, who was present. "You can't know anything of the sort. It's wrong to think so: you're just heading to get yourself hurt."

"You don't need to preach to me, Mr. Hamurabi. I know what I'm up to. A lady in Louisiana, she told me . . ."

"Yes yes yes—but you got to forget that. If it were me, I'd go home and stay put and forget about this goddamned jug."

"My brother's gonna play the fiddle at a wedding over in Cherokee City tonight and he's gonna give me the two bits," said Appleseed stubbornly. "Tomorrow I'll take my chance."

So the next day I felt kind of excited when Appleseed and Middy arrived. Sure enough, he had his quarter: it was tied for safekeeping in the corner of a red bandanna.

The two of them wandered hand in hand among the showcases, holding a whispery consultation as to what to purchase. They decided finally on a thimble-sized bottle of gardenia Cologne which Middy promptly opened and partly emptied on her hair. "It smells like . . . Oh, darlin' Mary, I ain't never smelled nothin' as sweet. Here, Appleseed, honey, let me douse some on your hair." But he wouldn't let her.

Mr. Marshall got out the ledger in which he kept his records, while Appleseed strolled over to the fountain and cupped the jug between his hands, stroking it gently. His eyes were bright and his cheeks flushed from excitement. Several persons who were in the drugstore at that moment crowded close. Middy stood in the background quietly scratching her leg and smelling the Cologne. Hamurabi wasn't there.

Mr. Marshall licked the point of his pencil and smiled. " Okay, son, what do you say ? "

Appleseed took a deep breath. " Seventy-seven dollars and thirty-five cents," he blurted.

In picking such an uneven sum he showed originality, for the run-of-the-mill guess was a plain round figure. Mr. Marshall repeated the amount solemnly as he copied it down.

" When'll I know if I won ? "

" Christmas Eve," someone said.

" That's tomorrow, huh ? "

" Why, so it is," said Mr. Marshall, not surprised. " Come at four o'clock."

During the night the thermometer dropped even lower, and towards dawn there was one of those swift, summerlike rainstorms, so that the following day was bright and frozen. The town was like a picture postcard of a northern scene, what with icicles sparkling whitely on the trees and frost flowers coating all window-panes. Mr. R. C. Judkins rose early and, for no clear reason, tramped the streets ringing a supper bell, stopping now and then to take a swig of whisky from a pint which he kept in his hip pocket. As the day was windless, smoke climbed lazily from various chimneys straight-way to the still, frozen sky. By mid-morning the Presbyterian choir was in full swing ; and the town kids (wearing horror masks, as at Hallowe'en) were chasing one another round and round the square.

Hamurabi dropped by at noon to help us fix up the Valhalla. He brought along a fat sack of nuts and together we ate every one, tossing the husks into a newly installed potbellied stove (a present from Mr. Marshall to himself) which stood in the middle of the room. Then my uncle took the jug off the fountain, polished and placed it on a prominently situated table. He was no help after that what-soever, for he squatted in a chair and spent his time tying and re-tying a tacky green ribbon around the jug. So Hamurabi and I had the rest to do alone : we swept the floor and washed the mirrors and dusted the cabinets and strung streamers of red and green crêpe paper from wall to wall. When we were finished it looked very fine and elegant.

But Hamurabi gazed sadly at our work, and said : " Well, I think I better be getting along now."

" Aren't you going to stay ? " asked Mr. Marshall, shocked.

" No, oh, no," said Hamurabi, shaking his head slowly. " I don't want to see that kid's face. This is Christmas and I mean to have a rip-roaring time. And I couldn't, not with something like that on my conscience. Hell, I wouldn't sleep."

" Suit yourself," said Mr. Marshall. And he shrugged, but

you could see he was really hurt. " Life's like that—and besides, who knows, he might win."

Hamurabi sighed gloomily. " What's his guess ? "

" Seventy-seven dollars and thirty-five cents," I said.

" Now I ask you, isn't that fantastic ? " said Hamurabi. He slumped in a chair next to Mr. Marshall. " If you got any Baby Ruths I think I'd like one ; my mouth tastes sour."

As the afternoon wore on, the three of us sat around the table feeling terribly blue. No one said hardly a word and, as the kids had deserted the square, the only sound was the clock tolling the hour in the court-house steeple. The Valhalla was closed to business, but people kept passing by and peeking in the window. At three o'clock Mr. Marshall told me to unlock the door.

Within twenty minutes the place was jam full ; everyone was wearing his Sunday best, and the air smelled sweet, for most of the little silk-mill girls had scented themselves with vanilla flavouring. They scrunched up against the walls, perched on the fountain, squeezed in wherever they could ; soon the crowd had spread to the sidewalk and stretched into the road. The square was lined with team-drawn wagons and Model T Fords that had carted farmers and their families into town. There was much laughter and shouting and joking—several outraged ladies complained of the cursing and the rough, shoving ways of the younger men, but nobody left.

At the side entrance a gang of coloured folks had formed and were having the most fun of all. Everybody was making the best of a good thing. It's usually so quiet around here : nothing much ever happens. It's safe to say that nearly all of Wachata County was present but invalids and Rufus McPherson. I looked around for Appleseed but didn't see him anywhere.

Mr. Marshall harumphed, and clapped for attention. When things quieted down and the atmosphere was properly tense, he raised his voice like an auctioneer, and called : " Now listen, everybody, in this here envelope you see in my hand "—he held a manila envelope above his head—" well, in it's the *answer*—which nobody but God and the First National Bank knows up to now, ha, ha. And in this book "—he held up the ledger with his free hand—" I've got written down what you folks guessed. Are there any questions ? " All was silence. " Fine. Now, if we could have a volunteer . . . "

Not a living soul budged an inch : it was as if an awful shyness had overcome the crowd, and even those who were ordinarily natural-born show-offs shuffled their feet, ashamed. Then a voice, Appleseed's, hollered, " Lemme by . . . Outa the way, please, ma'am." Trotting along behind as he pushed forward were Middy

and a lanky, sleepy-eyed fellow who was evidently the fiddling brother. Appleseed was dressed the same as usual, but his face was scrubbed rosy clean, his boots polished and his hair slicked back. " Did we get here in time ? " he panted.

But Mr. Marshall said, " So you want to be our volunteer ? "

Appleseed looked bewildered, then nodded vigorously.

" Does anybody have an objection to this young man ? "

Still there was dead quiet. Mr. Marshall handed the envelope to Appleseed who accepted it calmly. He chewed his under lip while studying it a moment before ripping the flap.

In all that congregation there was no sound except an occasional cough and the soft tinkling of Mr. R. C. Judkins' supper bell. Hamurabi was leaning against the fountain, staring up at the ceiling ; Middy was gazing blankly over her brother's shoulder, and when he started to tear open the envelope she let out a pained little gasp.

Appleseed withdrew a slip of pink paper and, holding it as though it was very fragile, muttered to himself whatever was written there. Suddenly his face paled and tears glistened in his eyes.

" Hey, speak up, boy," someone hollered.

Hamurabi stepped forward and all but snatched the slip away. He cleared his throat and commenced to read when his expression changed most comically. " Well, Mother o' God . . ." he said.

" Louder ! Louder ! " an angry chorus demanded.

" Buncha crooks ! " yelled Mr. R. C. Judkins. " I smell a rat and he smells to high heaven ! " Whereupon a cyclone of catcalls and whistling rent the air.

Appleseed's brother whirled round and shook his fist. " Shuddup, shuddup 'fore I bust every one a your goddamn heads together so's you got knots the size a musk melons, hear me ? "

" Citizens," cried Mayor Mawes, " citizens—I say, this is Christmas . . . I say . . ."

And Mr. Marshall hopped up on a chair and clapped and stamped till a minimum of order was restored. It might as well be noted here that we later found out Rufus McPherson had paid Mr. R. C. Judkins to start the rumpus. Anyway, when the outbreak was quelled, who should be in possession of the slip but me . . . don't ask how.

Without thinking, I shouted, " Seventy-seven dollars and thirty-five cents." Naturally, due to the excitement, I didn't at first catch the meaning ; it was just a number. Then Appleseed's brother let forth with his whooping yell, and so I understood. The name of the winner spread quickly, and the awed, murmuring whispers were like a rainstorm.

Oh, Appleseed himself was a sorry sight. He was crying as though he was mortally wounded, but when Hamurabi lifted him

on to his shoulders so the crowd could get a look, he dried his eyes with the cuffs of his sweater and began grinning. Mr. R. C. Judkins yelled, " Gyp ! Lousy gyp ! " but was drowned out by a deafening round of applause.

Middy grabbed my arm. " My teeth," she squealed. " Now I'm gonna get my teeth."

" Teeth ? " said I, kind of dazed.

" The false kind," says she. " That's what we're gonna get us with the money—a lovely set of white false teeth."

But at that moment my sole interest was in how Appleseed had known. " Hey, tell me," I said desperately, " tell me, how did he *know* there was just exactly seventy-seven dollars and thirty-five cents ? "

Middy gave me a look. " Why, I thought he told you," she said, real serious. " He counted."

" Yes, but how—how ? "

" Gee, don't you even know how to count ? "

" But is that all he did ? "

" Well," she said, following a thoughtful pause, " he did do a little praying, too." She started to dart off, then turned back and called, " Besides, he was born with a caul on his head."

And that's the nearest anybody ever came to solving the mystery. Thereafter, if you were to ask Appleseed " How . . . ? " he would smile strangely and change the subject. Years later the family moved to somewhere in Florida and were never heard from again.

But in our town his legend flourishes still ; and, till his death a year ago last April, Mr. Marshall was invited each Christmas Day to tell the story of Appleseed to the Baptist Bible class. Hamurabi once typed up an account and mailed it around to various magazines. It was never printed. One editor wrote back and said that " if the little girl really turned out to be a movie star, then there might be something to your story." But that's not what happened, so why should you lie ?

* * *

CEASE FIRE!

At the first performance of an ultra-modern Ballet Mécanique, the orchestra contained ten grand pianos, six xylophones, a fire-alarm siren, an aircraft propeller, and several motor horns.

As the music gained volume, the audience became restless. Finally, at the end of ten minutes, a man in the second row raised his cane to which was attached a white handkerchief . . .

E. C. W.

EXIT MR. WHITE

"I've had a stroke of luck," said the little man. "Is my tombstone still here?"

by RAY BRADBURY

WELL, first of all there was the long trip, and the dust poking up inside her thin nostrils, and Walter, her Oklahoma husband, swaying his lean carcass in their model-T Ford, so sure of himself it made her want to spit; then they got into this big brick town that was strange as old sin, and hunted up a landlord. The landlord took them to a small room and unlocked the door.

There in the middle of the simple room sat the tombstone.

Leota's eyes got a wise look, and immediately she pretended to gasp, and thoughts skipped through her mind in devilish quickness. Her superstitions were something Walter had never been able to touch or take away from her. She gasped, drew back, and Walter stared at her with his droopy eyelids hanging over his shiny grey eyes.

"No, no," cried Leota, definitely. "I'm not moving into any room with any dead man!"

"Leota!" said her husband.

"What do you mean?" wondered the landlord. "Madam, you don't—"

Leota smiled inwardly. Of course she didn't really believe, but this was her only weapon against her Oklahoma man, so—"I mean that I won't sleep in no room with no corpse. Get him out of here!"

Walter gazed at the sagging bed wearily, and this gave Leota pleasure, to be able to frustrate him. Yes, indeed, superstitions were handy things. She heard the landlord saying, "This tombstone is the very finest grey marble. It belongs to Mr. Whetmore."

"The name carved on the stone is WHITE," observed Leota coldly.

"Certainly. That's the man's name for whom the stone was carved."

"And is he dead?" asked Leota, waiting.

The landlord nodded.

"There, you *see*!" cried Leota. Walter groaned a groan which meant he was not stirring another inch looking for a room. "It smells like a cemetery in here," said Leota, watching Walter's eyes get hot and flinty. The landlord explained:

" Mr. Whetmore, the former tenant of this room, was an apprentice marble-cutter, this was his first job, he used to tap on it with a chisel every night from seven until ten."

" Well—" Leota glanced swiftly around to find Mr. Whetmore. " Where is he ? Did he die, too ? " She enjoyed this game.

" No, he discouraged himself and stopped cutting this stone to work in an envelope factory."

" Why ? "

" He made a mistake." The landlord tapped the marble lettering. " WHITE is the name here. Spelled wrong. Should be WHYTE, with a Y instead of an I. Poor Mr. Whetmore. Inferiority complex. Gave up at the least little mistake and scuttled off."

" I'll be damned," said Walter, shuffling into the room and unpacking the rusty-brown suitcases, his back to Leota. The landlord liked to tell the rest of the story :

" Yes, Mr. Whetmore gave up easily. To show you how touchy he was, he'd percolate coffee in the mornings, and if he spilled a teaspoonful it was a catastrophe—he'd throw it all away and not drink coffee for days ! Think of that ! He got very sad when he made errors. If he put his left shoe on first, instead of his right, he'd quit trying and walk barefooted for ten or twelve hours, on cold mornings, even. Or if someone spelled his name wrong on his letters, he'd replace them in the mail-box marked NO SUCH PERSON LIVING HERE. Oh, he was a great one, was Mr. Whetmore ! "

" That don't paddle us no further up-crick," pursued Leota grimly. " Walter, what're you doing ? "

" Hanging your silk dress in this closet ; the red one."

" Stop hanging, we're not staying."

The landlord blew out his breath, not understanding how a woman could grow so dumb. " I'll explain once more. Mr. Whetmore did his homework here ; he hired a truck which carried this tombstone here one day while I was out shopping for a turkey at the grocery, and when I walked back—tap-tap-tap—I heard it all the way downstairs—Mr. Whetmore had started chipping the marble. And he was so proud I didn't dare complain. But he was so awful proud he made a spelling mistake and now he ran off without a word, his rent is paid all the way till Tuesday, but he didn't want a refund, and now I've got some carters with a hoist who'll come up first thing in the morning. You won't mind sleeping here one night with it, now will you ? Of course not."

The husband nodded. " You understand, Leota ? Ain't no dead man under that rug." He sounded so superior, she wanted to kick him.

She didn't believe him, and she stiffened. She poked a finger at the landlord. " *You* want your money. And you, Walter, you want

a bed to drop your bones on. Both of you are lying from the word 'go'!"

The Oklahoma man paid the landlord his money tiredly, with Leota nagging him. The landlord ignored her as if she were invisible, said good night and she cried "Liar!" after him as he shut the door and left them alone. Her husband undressed and got into bed and said, "Don't stand there staring at the tombstone, turn out the light. We been travelling four days and I'm bushed."

Her tight criss-crossed arms began to quiver over her thin breasts. "None of the three of us," she said, nodding at the stone, "will get any sleep."

Twenty minutes later, disturbed by the various sounds and movements, the Oklahoma man unveiled his vulture's face from the bed-sheets, blinking stupidly. "Leota, you still up? I said, a long time ago, for you to switch off the light and come sleep! What are you doing there?"

It was quite evident what she was about. Crawling on rough hands and knees, she placed a jar of fresh-cut red, white and pink geraniums beside the headstone, and another tin-can of new-cut roses at the foot of the imagined grave. A pair of shears lay on the floor, dewy with having snipped flowers in the night outside a moment before.

Now she briskly whisked the colourful linoleum and the worn rug with a midget whisk broom, praying so her husband couldn't hear the words, but just the murmur. When she rose up, she stepped across the grave carefully so as not to defile the buried one, and in crossing the room she skirted far around the spot, saying, "There, that's done," as she darkened the room and laid herself out on the whining springs which sang in tune with her husband who now asked, "What in the Lord's name!" and she replied, looking at the dark around her, "No man's going to rest easy with strangers sleeping right atop him. I made amends with him, flowered his bed so he won't stand around rubbing his bones together late tonight."

Her husband looked at the place she occupied in the dark, and couldn't think of anything good enough to say, so he just swore, groaned, and sank down into sleeping.

Not half an hour later, she grabbed his elbow and turned him so she could whisper swiftly, fearfully into one of his ears, like a person calling into a cave: "Walter!" she cried: "Wake up, wake up!" She intended doing this all night, if need be, to spoil his superior kind of slumber.

He struggled with her. "What's wrong?"

"Mr. White! Mr. White! He's starting to haunt us!"

"Oh, go to sleep!"

" I'm not fibbing ! Listen to him ! "

The Oklahoma man listened. From under the linoleum, sounding about six feet or so down, muffled, came a man's sorrowful talking. Not a word came through clearly, just a sort of sad mourning.

The Oklahoma man sat up in bed. Feeling his movement, Leota hissed, " You heard, you heard ? " excitedly. The Oklahoma man put his feet on the cold linoleum. The voice below changed into a falsetto. Leota began to sob. " Shut up, so I can hear," demanded her husband, angrily. Then, in the heart-beating quiet, he bent his ear to the floor and Leota cried, " Don't tip over the flowers ! " and he cried; " Shut up ! " and again listened, tensed. Then he spat out an oath and rolled back under the covers. " It's only the man downstairs," he muttered.

" That's what I mean. Mr. White ! "

" No, not Mr. White. We're on the second floor of an apartment house, and we got neighbours down under. Listen." The falsetto downstairs talked. " That's the man's wife. She's probably telling him not to look at another man's wife ! Both of them probably drunk."

" You're lying ! " insisted Leota. " Acting brave when you're really trembling fit to shake the bed down. It's a haunt, I tell you, and he's talking in voices, like Gran'ma Hanlon used to do, rising up in her church pew and making queer tongues all mixed like a black man, an Irishman, two women and tree frogs, caught in her craw ! That dead man, Mr. White, hates us for moving in with him tonight, I tell you ! Listen ! "

As if to back her up, the voices downstairs talked louder. The Oklahoma man lay on his elbows, shaking his head hopelessly, wanting to laugh, but too tired.

Something crashed.

" He's stirring in his coffin ! " shrieked Leota. " He's mad ! We got to move outa here, Walter, or we'll be found dead tomorrow ! "

More crashes, more bangs, more voices. Then, silence. Followed by a movement of feet in the air over their heads.

Leota whimpered. " He's free of his tomb ! Forced his way out and he's tromping the air over our heads ! "

By this time, the Oklahoma man had his clothing on. Beside the bed, he put on his boots.

" This building's three floors high," he said, tucking in his shirt. " We got neighbours overhead who just come home." To Leota's weeping he had this to say, " Come on. I'm taking you upstairs to meet them people. That'll prove who they are. Then we'll walk downstairs to the first floor and talk to that drunkard and his wife. Get up, Leota."

Someone knocked on the door.

Leota squealed and rolled over and over making a quilted mummy of herself. " He's in his tomb again, rapping to get out ! "

The Oklahoma man switched on the lights and unlocked the door. A very jubilant little man in a dark suit, with wild blue eyes, wrinkles, grey hair and thick glasses danced in.

" Sorry, sorry," declared the little man. " I'm Mr. Whetmore. I went away. Now I'm back. I've had the most astonishing stroke of luck. Yes, I have. Is my tombstone still here ? " He looked at the stone a moment before he saw it. " Ah, yes, yes, it is ! Oh, hello." He saw Leota peering from many layers of blanket. " I've some men with a roller-truck, and, if you don't mind, we'll move the tombstone out of here, this very moment. It'll only take a minute."

The husband laughed with gratitude. " Glad to get rid of the damned thing. Wheel her out ! "

Mr. Whetmore directed two brawny workmen into the room. He was almost breathless with anticipation. " The most amazing thing. This morning I was lost, beaten, dejected—but a miracle happened." The tombstone was loaded on to a small coaster truck. " Just an hour ago, I heard, by chance, of a Mr. White who had just died of pneumonia. A Mr. White, mind you, who spells his name with an I instead of a Y. I have just contacted his wife, and she is delighted that the stone is all prepared. And Mr. White not cold more than sixty minutes, and spelling his name with an I, just think of it. Oh, I'm so happy ! "

The tombstone, on its truck, rolled from the room, while Mr. Whetmore and the Oklahoma man laughed, shook hands, and Leota watched with suspicion as the commotion came to an end. " Well, that's now all over," grinned her husband as he closed the door on Mr. Whetmore, and began throwing the flowers into the sink and dropping the tin cans into a waste-basket. In the dark, he climbed into bed again, oblivious of her deep and solemn silence. She said not a word for a long while, but just lay there, alone-feeling. She felt him adjust the blankets with a sigh. " Now we can sleep. The damn old thing's took away. It's only ten-thirty. Plenty of time for sleep." How he enjoyed spoiling her fun.

Leota was about to speak when a rapping came from down below again. " There ! There ! " she cried, triumphantly, holding her husband. " There it is again, the noises, like I said. Hear them ! "

Her husband knotted his fists and clenched his teeth. " How many times must I explain. Do I have to kick you in the head to make you understand, woman ? Let me alone. There's nothing—"

" Listen, listen, oh, listen," she begged in a whisper.

They listened in the square darkness.

A rapping on a door came from downstairs.

A door opened. Muffled and distant and faint, a woman's voice said, sadly, " Oh, it's you, Mr. Whetmore."

And deep down in the darkness underneath the suddenly shivering bed of Leota and her Oklahoma husband, Mr. Whetmore's voice replied : " Good evening again, Mrs. White. Here. I brought the stone."

* * *

ANSWERS to IT'S A GIFT on page 27

1. *In " Briar Rose," by the Brothers Grimm, the wicked fairy condemns the baby princess to die when she pricks her finger. The last fairy amends this to a sleep for a hundred years.*
2. *The fan in " Lady Windermere's Fan," by Oscar Wilde. Lady Windermere, leaving it at Lord Darlington's flat, nearly ruins her own marriage as well as her mother's prospects.*
3. *In the Second Book of Chronicles, the Queen of Sheba, visiting King Solomon, brings him gold, spices and precious stones.*
4. *In the lyric, " To Celia," by Ben Jonson, the poet sends his lady a rosy wreath hoping that in her presence " it could not wither'd be."*
5. *In "All Passion Spent," by V. Sackville-West, Mr. FitzGeorge, a millionaire, leaves his entire estate to Lady Slane, who, to the chagrin of her family, hands it over to the nation.*
6. *In the short story, " The Mummy's Foot," by Théophile Gautier, the young man gives the Princess Hermonthis back her mummified foot, and she gives him a little idol of green paste.*
7. *The diamond necklace in " Henry Esmond," by W. M. Thackeray. Henry gives it to Beatrix, and later sells it to equip his American estate when he has married Beatrix's mother, Rachel.*
8. *The ring given by Portia to Bassanio in " The Merchant of Venice," by William Shakespeare.*

* * *

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, Jelly. 4, Samaritan. 9, Complex. 10, Summary. 11, Feed. 12, Lewis. 13, Lieu. 16, Outspan. 17, Going up. 19, Tidings. 22, Trawler. 24, Hawk. 25, Otter. 26, Oder. 29, Epitaph. 30, Rickety. 31, Sugarplum. 32, Easel.

Down. 1, Jack Frost. 2, Lambert. 3, Yale. 4, Sixteen. 5, Missing. 6, Ramp. 7, Tearing. 8, Noyau. 14, Spent. 15, Midas. 18, Portrayal. 20, Downing. 21, Satchel. 22, Theorem. 23, Ladders. 24, Heels. 27, Lair. 28, Acme.

JALEEL THE ARAB

No horse I have ever known has the same place in my heart

by R. S. SUMMERHAYS

MY Arabian stallion Jaleel is one of the best known and most beautiful Arabs of the last twenty years. He was bred by Lady Wentworth at Crabbet Park, and is by Naseem out of Jawi Jawi, Naseem being by the famous Skowronek. He has had a very successful career in the show ring, having been shown nineteen times and received eighteen awards, and his stock is to be found at many shows. His son, Haji, owned by Harry Pickles, has very many ribbons to his credit and was Champion Arabian Riding Horse at the International Horse Show two years in succession.

Somewhere in the late twenties Frank Kennedy-Shaw asked me to go with him to Roehampton Club to see two Arabs, an entire and a mare, as he wanted an Arab for his wife to ride. There we saw Jaleel and Rose-of-the-Sea. I rode them both and Kennedy-Shaw decided to buy Rose-of-the-Sea. I woke rather early the following morning with the fixed intention of buying Jaleel, a thing which never entered my mind as I went to sleep. I bought him before the day ended.

No horse I have ever owned has the same place in my heart as Jaleel. He seems to have all the virtues and his great charm and docility are most endearing. A man of many parts, too, is this dear old fellow, for besides his great career as a show horse, he is widely travelled : to America from the Crabbet Stud, and from there to the South of France, where he played a lot of polo. I bought him shortly after he arrived in England, and at the time Willie Anderson, secretary of the Arab Horse Society, was using him as an umpire's pony at Roehampton.

Although I did not hunt him regularly, I followed hounds on him a number of times which he enjoyed very much. Being a horse of great beauty and glamour it will surprise no one to learn that he played the lead in two films, the first being *The Four Feathers* which was made at Denham Studios. In that Jaleel galloped through fire, jumped over dead bodies and seemed not the slightest bit upset by the amount of gunfire, rifle shots and general uproar.

So tractable and altogether successful was he and so greatly did

his beauty attract the eye, that a year or two later, when Sir Alexander Korda was producing *The Thief of Baghdad*, he more or less insisted on having, as he called him, his "Chocolate Horse," Jaleel being a liver chestnut with golden mane and tail. One of the characters in this film was a real live cheetah, and he and Jaleel became very good friends.

It happened, however, that one day when the performers were sitting around in the sunshine during a luncheon interval, Jaleel's acting career came to a sudden and dramatic end. Some actors were eating sandwiches and throwing bits to sparrows. Unfortunately these came within reach of the cheetah which, in an instant, sprang at them to the length of his chain.

Jaleel was standing nearby and the suddenness sent him rearing right up and, slipping on the gravel, he came over backwards with some violence. He was quite a bit cut and some flesh was knocked off in places, but he soon recovered. Anyway, he could not complete his part in the film. Today at the age of twenty-three he remains the gay, beautiful and lovable fellow I first saw at Roehampton.

And now, with a decreasing call upon him for stud duties, I have been able to carry out a wish of long ago, by giving him to one of his great admirers, who has done so much for the horse world and for me in my activities there. Today Jaleel finds himself near Heathfield in the home of Stella Walker, and it seems quite in keeping with his life of glamour that this old film star should, shortly after his arrival in Sussex, have received an urgent call to stage a comeback at Pinewood Studios. He prefers, however, to spend his remaining years hacking quietly through that lovely countryside rather than receive the adulation of a film star's life. At his age, I think he is right.

As proof that he retains his intelligence (he can never lose his romantic beauty), Stella tells me that he thoroughly enjoys carrying her while they do a bit of shepherding together, and, she assures me, he can count up to thirty-two sheep! On sunny days, in his green paddock, with high hedges to give him shade and shelter, he has his little pony mare as companion, and when night falls, under the thoughtful and loving care of Stella and Geoffrey Walker, he lies in his great big box, deep bedded. I would like to think that there he dwells on his memories, and has the same kindly thoughts about his life with humans as I have about mine with horses.

* * *

Time tells on a man, especially a good time.

Author Unknown

SYBILLA

"What is so terrible about today?" asked Lady Brassington

by H. B. MALLALIEU

ROGER PETTIGREW was fourteen at the time and had just won a Classics prize at school, where he was considered the most brilliant scholar in fifty years. His father (Lt. Col. Retd.) had asked him to keep the party going while he drove down to meet the Garlands at the station. Roger was finding the task difficult. None of the guests paid attention to anything he said, nor did they contribute much towards breaking the long silences. Dinner should have begun half an hour ago.

"Train must be late," said the vicar, looking impatiently at his watch.

"Sybilla Garland is Italian, isn't she?" asked Caroline Queenborough-Pilkington, as though this might have something to do with the train being late.

"In a manner of speaking," answered Roger, helping himself to another lemonade.

"Are you referring to her language or casting doubts on her ancestry?" queried Lady Brassington in her most masculine voice. She disliked boys between the ages of eight and thirty, Roger more than most.

"There is, unfortunately, no doubt about her ancestry," said Roger. "I advised father not to bring her."

"We are more broad-minded than the younger generation," put in Caroline, not unkindly.

"The breadth of one's mind depends, I believe, on the sharpness of one's conscience," said the dreadful boy. "I was not, however, referring to Sybilla's parentage, but to her habits."

"Explain yourself, child," said Lady Brassington, intrigued in spite of herself.

"My father doesn't believe the story and specially asked me not to tell it," Roger began. But having at last succeeded in making himself the centre of interest, he had no intention of remaining silent. "We met the Garlands in Italy. That was before they were married. George was staying in the same hotel as we were, not far from Positano on what is so rightly called the divine coast.

One day we had rowed across to the Galli, of which you will naturally know from your reading of Strabo. These three treeless, but not flowerless, rocks lie, like three parts of a legend, off the Italian coast. There was a small modern house on the island we had visited.

"'That,' said George, pointing to the house, 'rather spoils the atmosphere.'

"'Not so much as this,' I said, pointing out a bleached and hideous thing lying on the rocks. It was a human skeleton.

"'Some poor sailor been washed up.' My father is always content with what appears to be the most likely explanation.

"'Aren't these the islands where Ulysses heard the sirens singing?' asked George. 'Some of the local fisherfolk, who are of ancient Greek descent, still believe in the sirens. Extraordinary how hard some of these old legends die.'

"'Not only the older sort,' I said, and explained that the sirens no longer wore the feathered dresses of antiquity. I had made exhaustive enquiries among the fishermen."

"I always supposed, it would appear quite mistakenly," said Lady Brassington, "that sirens were a form of fish, like mermaids."

"Neither fish nor fowl," answered Roger. "Eustathius, whom you have undoubtedly read, explains that sirens differed in only one respect from ordinary nymphs and naiads. They were persistently chaste and Venus, who found their abstinence unbecoming, attempted to change them into birds. In this, as was so often the case with the gods and goddesses, she was only half successful, but the prejudice of the sirens in favour of chastity remained. As you will see later."

Lady Brassington hurriedly interposed, "Are you trying to imply, boy, that these creatures still exist?"

"Why not? Would you believe my description of an elephant if you had never seen one?"

Caroline thought, in view of Lady Brassington's size, that she might well have done. Roger went on:

"I prefer elephants to sirens since the former are vegetarians. That skeleton may have been a sailor but he had not been washed up. His bones had been picked quite clean.

"Neither my father nor George believed my explanation, not even when, from the direction of the small, white house, we suddenly heard the most wonderful singing that can be imagined. A woman's voice, it was, singing a song so ancient that the rocks knew it and the sea recognized its melody; beautiful and yet, in some inexplicable way, hideous, as if it had been an anthem sung at the gates of Hell, a lament for the lost daylight and the winds that play no more about the dead.

" ' Let's go,' I said. ' This sort of thing can be dangerous.'

" I think I should have convinced both of them that it was time to go—the unearthly element in the song was too easily recognized and, while it might have fooled Ulysses, it could not have been expected to trick us, who know so much more about the universe—but at that moment the singing stopped and a woman walked out of the house towards us. It was Sybilla.

" I admit she was attractive by all classical standards, dressed simply and sensibly in white, but I think George Garland overdid the calf-love stuff. She was, undoubtedly, a smasher, but anyone should have been able to see at a glance that she didn't belong only to this world. Mind you, she carried it off quite well.

" She came over to us, looked for a moment at the skeleton and then at George with what I can only describe as a hungry look—he was fatter then than he is now—and said, ' I wonder if you would mind helping me throw this '—she was referring to the skeleton—' into the sea. The local council insist that anything on this island, even human debris, is my private property and I have to dispose of it myself.'

" George, of course, fell for it and soon my father and he, having drowned the human debris, were sitting with Sybilla, deep in the sort of conversation adults seem to have with pretty women. I had fortunately brought a book on the earlier Byzantine saints and managed to occupy the next few hours in the entertaining company of the original pole-squatters.

" Imagine my horror when, evening having fallen with typical Mediterranean abruptness, George invited Sybilla to accompany us back to the mainland. She hesitated for a moment and I whispered to my father, ' You can't take that back to the hotel,' but I'm afraid he misunderstood me. She knew that I had seen through her and out of sheer bravado she said to George, ' Darling, that would be lovely.'

" You can see they had got on quite fast. She said she had better go back to the house to slip something on for the evening, but when she came out, this time in black—what there was of it—it looked more as if she had slipped something off. Mind you, I must repeat, she was a smasher.

" I knew there would be trouble and there was. As we entered the hotel, the receptionist disappeared hurriedly through a back room. The waiters dropped whatever they were carrying and ran. The elevator-boy took the lift up so fast that it hit the roof. Only the foreign guests remained unmoved. My father did not, of course, link up this odd behaviour with his own party ; he attributed it merely to the Italian exuberance of spirit.

"We had no sooner sat down at a table on the terrace, however, than the manager signalled to my father from a respectable distance. The poor man was obviously scared out of his wits and dared not approach our table. My father went over to him, and, in turn, signalled to George. A long altercation ensued. Soon half the town had joined in. The Italians do that sort of thing very well. Sybilla sat quite calmly and I took advantage of the interval to ask her a question of my own.

"'Do you eat them raw?' I asked.

"She blanched perceptibly. 'Eat what raw?' she queried.

"'You know what I mean,' I said. She muttered something about the sun being too strong for some people, but evaded answering my question.

"We had to leave the hotel and my father was so furious that we left Italy altogether. George stayed on and eventually persuaded Sybilla to marry him. They were married exactly a year ago today."

"Then it is their first wedding anniversary," said the vicar. "How very jolly."

"I'm afraid it won't be at all jolly, you know," continued Roger. "We didn't see much of them in England, but my father has told me some details and I've been able to piece the story together. It seems George could never persuade her to sing, and, what was even more irritating, I gather that Sybilla refused to consume the marriage."

"I should have thought in these days of rationing, she would have consumed anything," remarked Lady Brassington hurriedly, relieved that the monstrous Roger still had certain gaps in his knowledge.

"I think," said Caroline, blushing, "Roger means consummate."

"That is, I believe, the word used by Polixenes the Elder," said Roger, unabashed. "In his chapter on the advantage of chastity in the first years of cannibal life—"

"Connubial," corrected the vicar, scarcely above a whisper.

"I'm afraid in this case it is much the same thing," Roger continued. "George, of course, attributed her reluctance purely to local custom, which revealed an astonishing ignorance of the part of the world from which she came. They were, however, very happy until George had to go up North on business—nobody, of course, goes North for pleasure.

"The newspapers, you may recall, made a lot of fuss of the Piccadilly incident, as it was called. It appears that at about three o'clock one morning, singing of unearthly beauty was heard emanating from the island in the middle of the Circus. Several people confirmed this. The next morning the body, or, to be

more accurate, the bones of a young student were found littered round Eros. The next night the singing was repeated, on this occasion in the vicinity of Westminster Bridge. The melody was wafted along the none-too-sweet waters of the Thames, and people who listened described it as the most beautiful music they had ever heard. The man was never identified.

" George returned on the third day to their London home. She asked him if they might move to the country.

" ' London is not good for me,' she told him. ' I'm putting on too much weight.'

" George who until yesterday—I dare not speak about today—had not connected the terrible happenings in London with Sybilla, agreed. That is how they came to live at Oxleighden."

" What is so terrible about today ? " asked Lady Brassington.

" My only authority is Polixenes the Elder," said Roger, whose voice was beginning to take on a dramatic edge. " He says that the marriage is only consumed on the first anniversary."

Caroline was again about to correct him, but checked herself in time.

" Once this has been done, it is the custom of the sirens to dispose of their lovers in the usual manner. And today is, as the vicar has remarked, the first anniversary of their wedding."

" But how horrible," exclaimed Caroline, quite carried away.

At that moment Basil Pettigrew came in with the beautiful Sybilla.

" I hope the boy has been entertaining you," he said cheerily.

" I've managed to take their minds off food, anyway," said Roger.

" He's done more than that, the abominable wretch," remarked Lady Brassington, " he's taken away our appetites altogether."

" Where's George ? " asked Roger, his voice full of suspense.

" No idea," said Basil. " Don't know where he's got to. Well," he added after a pause, " let's go in to dinner."

" Forgive me if I don't join you," said Sybilla, " but I have already eaten."

She never could understand the look of absolute horror which greeted this simple statement.

* * *

TEAM SPIRIT

The next best thing to leading others astray is to be led astray oneself.

NORMAN DOUGLAS, *An Almanac*

GOOD CHEER

Let us sing, let us drink, and tune up our Round-lays . . .

FRANCOIS RABELAIS, 1494-1553

At Colewiz in Saxony, on Christmas Eve a company of young men and maids, whilst the priest was at mass in the church, were singing catches and love-songs in the churchyard ; he sent to them to make less noise, but they sung on still ; and if you will, you shall have the very song itself :

A fellow rid by the greenwood side,
And fair Meswinde was his bride,
Why stand we so, and do not go?

This they sung, he chafed, till at length, impatient as he was, he prayed to St. Magnus, patron of the church, they might all there sing and dance till that time twelvemonth, and so they did, without meat and drink, wearisomeness or giving over, till at year's end they ceased singing, and were absolved by Herebertus, Archbishop of Cologne.

ROBERT BURTON, 1577–1640,
The Anatomy of Melancholy

Thin Ice

" Now," said Wardle, after a substantial lunch, with the agreeable items of strong-beer and cherry-brandy, had been done ample justice to ; " what say you to an hour on the ice ? We shall have plenty of time . . ."

Old Wardle led the way to a pretty large sheet of ice ; and the fat boy and Mr. Weller, having shovelled and swept away the snow which had fallen on it during the night, Mr. Bob Sawyer adjusted his skaits with a dexterity which to Mr. Winkle was perfectly marvellous, and described circles with his left leg, and cut figures of eight ; and inscribed upon the ice, without once stopping for breath, a great many other pleasant and astonishing devices, to the excessive satisfaction of Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Tupman and the ladies ; which reached a pitch of positive enthusiasm, when old Wardle and Benjamin Allen, assisted by the aforesaid Bob Sawyer, performed some mystic evolutions, which they called a reel . . .

The sport was at its height . . . the laughter was at the loudest, when a smart sharp-crack was heard . . . A large mass of ice dis-

appeared, the water bubbled up over it, and Mr. Pickwick's hat, gloves, and handkerchief were floating on the surface; and this was all of Mr. Pickwick that anybody could see.

Dismay and anguish were depicted on every countenance; the males turned pale, and the females fainted . . . Mr. Tupman, by way of rendering the promptest assistance, and at the same time conveying to any persons who might be within hearing, the clearest possible notion of the catastrophe, ran off across the country at his utmost speed, screaming "Fire!" with all his might and main.

It was at this very moment . . . that a face, head, and shoulders emerged from beneath the water, and disclosed the features and spectacles of Mr. Pickwick.

"Keep yourself up for an instant—for only one instant," bawled Mr. Snodgrass.

"Yes, do; let me implore you—for my sake," roared Mr. Winkle, deeply affected. The adjuration was rather unnecessary; the probability being, that if Mr. Pickwick had declined to keep himself up for anybody else's sake, it would have occurred to him that he might as well do so, for his own . . .

After a vast quantity of splashing, and cracking, and struggling, Mr. Pickwick was at length fairly extricated from his unpleasant position, and once more stood on dry land . . .

A dozen shawls were offered on the instant; and . . . Mr. Pickwick was wrapped up, and started off, under the guidance of Mr. Weller; presenting the singular phenomenon of an elderly gentleman dripping wet, and without a hat, with his arms bound down to his sides, skimming over the ground without any clearly defined purpose, at the rate of six good English miles an hour.

CHARLES DICKENS, 1812–1870, *The Pickwick Papers*

All Through The Night

The dew is heavy on the grass,
At last the sun is set.
Fill up, fill up the cups of jade,
The night's before us yet!

All night the dew will heavy lie
Upon the grass and clover.
Too soon, too soon, the dew will dry,
Too soon the night be over!

Translated from the Chinese by HELEN WADDELL: *12th Century B.C., possibly the oldest drinking song in the world.*

Stag Party

The hall was a large one . . . entered by five doors at which stood Archers in black and grey robes. Within were several Knights and Esquires superintending the banquet . . .

By the door through which the other entremets had entered came a wonderfully large and beautiful white stag with golden antlers; its back covered with red silk, as well as I can remember. It was ridden by a fair boy twelve years of age, clad in a short crimson velvet robe, fine shoes and a black cap cut into many points. He held the stag's antlers with each hand, and, as soon as they were in the hall he began a song, in a loud, clear voice, to which the stag sang the tenor part, there being no other performers except him and the child. The name of the song they sang was " Naught have I ever seen like this."

OLIVIER DE LA MARCHE, *describing a feast given by Philip, Duke of Burgundy in* 1454. *Translated by G. G. and D. M. Stuart.*

Now Fare You Well—

It is now Christmas, and not a Cup of drinke must passe without a Caroll, the Beasts, Fowle and Fish, come to a generall execution, and the Corne is ground to dust for the Bakehouse, and the Pastry : Cards and Dice purge many a purse, . . . now good cheere and welcome, and God be with you, and I thanke you . . .

NICHOLAS BRETON, 1545–1626, *The Fantasticks*

And So—

I gave Patrick half a crown for his Christmas-box, on condition he would be good, and he came home drunk at midnight.

DEAN SWIFT, 1667–1745, *Journal to Stella*

—To Bed

Lordings, Christmas loves good drinking,
Wines of Gascoigne, France, Anjou,
English ale that drives out thinking,
Prince of liquors, old or new,
Every neighbour shares the bowl,
Drinks of the spicy liquor deep,
Drinks his fill without controul,
Till he drowns his care in sleep.

Anglo-Norman Song, Twelfth Century, translated by F. DOUCE

THE GREAT FROST

A Pageant in Crystal and Flame

by VIRGINIA WOOLF

THE Great Frost was, historians tell us, the most severe that has ever visited these islands. Birds froze in mid-air and fell like stones to the ground. At Norwich a young countrywoman started to cross the road in her usual robust health and was seen by the onlookers to turn visibly to powder and be blown in a puff of dust over the roofs as the icy blast struck her at the street corner. The mortality among the sheep and cattle was enormous. Corpses froze and could not be drawn from the sheets. It was no uncommon sight to come upon a whole herd of swine frozen immovable upon the road. The fields were full of shepherds, ploughmen, teams of horses, and little bird-scaring boys all struck stark in the act of the moment, one with his hand to his nose, another with the bottle to his lips, a third with a stone raised ready to throw at the raven who sat, as if stuffed, upon the hedge within a yard of him.

The severity of the frost was so extraordinary that a kind of petrification sometimes ensued; and it was commonly supposed that the great increase of rocks in some parts of Derbyshire was due to no eruption, for there was none, but to the solidification of unfortunate wayfarers who had been turned literally to stone where they stood. The Church could give little help in the matter, and though some landowners had these relics blessed, the most part preferred to use them either as landmarks, scratching-posts for sheep, or, when the form of the stone allowed, drinking troughs for cattle, which purposes they serve . . . to this day.

But while the country people suffered the extremity of want, and the trade of the country was at a standstill, London enjoyed a carnival of the utmost brilliancy. The Court was at Greenwich, and the new King seized the opportunity that his coronation gave him to curry favour with the citizens. He directed that the river, which was frozen to a depth of twenty feet and more for six or seven miles on either side, should be swept, decorated and given all the semblance of a park or pleasure ground, with arbours, mazes, alleys, drinking booths, etc., at his expense. For himself and the courtiers, he reserved a certain space immediately opposite the Palace gates; which, railed off from the public only by a silken rope, became at once the centre of the most brilliant society in England.

Great statesmen, in their beards and ruffs, despatched affairs of state under the crimson awning of the Royal Pagoda. Soldiers planned the conquest of the Moor and the downfall of the Turk in striped arbours surmounted by plumes of ostrich feathers. Admirals strode up and down the narrow pathways, glass in hand, sweeping the horizon and telling stories of the north-west passage and the Spanish Armada. Lovers dallied upon divans spread with sables. Frozen roses fell in showers when the Queen and her ladies walked abroad. Coloured balloons hovered motionless in the air. Here and there burnt vast bonfires of cedar and oak wood, lavishly salted, so that the flames were of green, orange, and purple fire. But however fiercely they burnt, the heat was not enough to melt the ice which, though of singular transparency, was yet of the hardness of steel.

So clear indeed was it that there could be seen, congealed at a depth of several feet, here a porpoise, there a flounder. Shoals of eels lay motionless in a trance . . . Near London Bridge, where the river had frozen to a depth of some twenty fathoms, a wrecked wherry boat was plainly visible, lying on the bed of the river where it had sunk last autumn, overladen with apples. The old bumboat woman, who was carrying her fruit to market on the Surrey side, sat there in her plaids and farthingales with her lap full of apples, for all the world as if she were about to serve a customer, though a certain blueness about the lips hinted the truth.

'Twas a sight King James specially liked to look upon, and he would bring a troupe of courtiers to gaze with him. In short, nothing could exceed the brilliancy and gaiety of the scene by day. But it was at night that the carnival was at its merriest. For the frost continued unbroken ; the nights were of perfect stillness ; the moon and stars blazed with the hard fixity of diamonds, and to the fine music of flute and trumpet the courtiers danced.

* * *

MORE SINNED AGAINST . . .

A priest hearing children's confessions was puzzled to find child after child adding, after a recital of more familiar and intelligible sins, that of " throwing peanuts in the river." He wondered whether they were repenting of wasting food or of river pollution, and then decided to press for a little more explanation, when the last and smallest child came in. But the smallest penitent failed to confess this. " Yes," said the priest, " is that all—isn't there something you've forgotten ? What about throwing peanuts in the river ? " " But, Father," said a bewildered voice, " I *am* Peanuts."

DOUGLAS WOODRUFF, *Still Talking At Random*

★*This story was written in the Seventeenth century, and in spite of the conventional ingredients—the same student and singing girl we meet in so many Chinese love stories, readers will agree that it still retains its freshness. The story has been translated by Rose Quong.*

THE SINGING GIRL RUI-YUN

by P'U SUNG-LING

RUI-YUN was a celebrated singing girl of Hangchow, matchless for her beauty and wit. When she was fourteen, old mother Tsai wished her to receive guests. Rui-yun said :

" This is the beginning of my new life, so let us not be hasty. The price may rest with you, but allow me to choose for myself." The old woman fixed the price at fifteen pieces of gold.

Daily there came visitors. Those who wished to see Rui-yun brought gifts, and if a guest came with generous gifts, she would play a game of chess or do a painting for him ; whoever brought a mean gift was served with a cup of tea—that was all. Soon her fame spread abroad, and rich merchants and elegant noblemen followed one after the other to her door.

There was then at Hangchow a scholar named Ho who had early won repute for his talent, but who possessed only moderate means. He had for some time looked up to Rui-yun with respect, and had not dared dream of any intimacy. But now he did his best to prepare some small gift, hoping only for the favour of seeing her ; he feared that among so many admirers she would not notice one so poor as he. When they met, however, after a few words she received him and was extremely gracious. They sat talking for quite a while ; her eyebrows and eyes betrayed the warmth of her feeling, and she wrote a poem for him :

Why should one who begs for rice water
Knock at the door of Lan-chiao, fairy-like in splendour ?
If your heart is seeking a jade beauty,
Seek her only here in the world of mortals.

Ho was frantically happy and longed to speak further with her, but just then a little maidservant announced another guest, so he hurriedly left her.

On returning home, he read the poem over and over with joy, and all his dreams were of her. After a few days he could no longer control his emotion, so he dressed carefully and went again to see Rui-yun. She received him with extreme delight, and whispered whether he could not plan for one night together.

"Penniless scholar as I am," said Ho, "I have only the folly of offering a devoted friendship; the little gifts I have already given have strained my slender means. In your fragrant presence I am content; how should I dare dream of our intimate union?"

On hearing this Rui-yun was touched, and sadly they faced each other without a word. Long Ho sat and gave no sign of going. Again and again the old woman called to Rui-yun, to hurry him off. Ho at last left, but so heartsick was he that he thought of selling all he possessed for a single moment of joy, and after that they would part. How could he bear that? Then on reflection his enthusiasm all burned away, and communication between them ceased.

Rui-yun for several months continued to pick and choose, but no one suited her. The old woman, greatly enraged, was about to force her, but had not come to that when one day a scholar appeared and presented a gift. He sat talking with Rui-yun a little while, and then he rose and with his finger pressed her forehead, saying: "What a pity! What a pity!" Then he departed.

Rui-yun escorted him out, and when she returned, there was noticed on her forehead a fingerprint black as ink. She tried to wash it off, but it grew more distinct. In a few days the black mark gradually spread, and at the end of the year it covered her cheek-bones and nose. Those who saw her at once burst out laughing. No longer was there any sign of carriages and horses at her door.

The old woman took away all her fine attire and put her to work with the servant maids. Rui-yun, soft and delicate, could not bear the toil she was driven to, and grew more and more exhausted.

Now when Ho heard about this he came to see her and found her in the kitchen, looking ugly as a demon and with her hair all dishevelled. When she raised her head and saw Ho, she turned her face to the wall to hide herself. Ho, filled with pity, sold goods and land to pay Rui-yun's ransom, and led her to his home.

When she entered the door, she caught hold of his robe and wept; she would not dare consider herself as his companion, but wished to be his handmaiden until he took to himself a wife. Ho said: "What should be more highly esteemed than friendship? In the days of your prosperity, my dear one, you especially favoured me as a friend; how then can I forget you in your days of adversity?"

And he took no other woman.

A year passed and then it happened that Ho went to Soochow,

and there he met a man named Heh, who unexpectedly asked Ho for news of the famous singing girl Rui-yun of Hangchow. Ho told him she was married. "And to whom?" Heh asked.

"To a man of my kind," replied Ho.

"If he is like you," said Heh, "then it can indeed be said that she has the right man. And how much did he pay for her?"

Ho replied: "Because she had been strangely afflicted, the price was low. Otherwise how could a man like me obtain so beautiful a singing girl?"

And again Heh asked: "Is the man really like you?" Ho, surprised at this, questioned him in his turn, and Heh smiled and said: "Truly I am not deceiving you. Once I visited this lovely girl and was filled with pity for her, such incomparable grace and so unfortunate to go through life unmated. I therefore devised a way to obscure her brilliance and protect its freshness, and thus allow her to wait for a man of compassion and discernment who would really know her worth."

Ho at once asked: "If you could put a mark on her, then you can take it away?"

Heh smilingly said: "Why not? But the man himself must ask me in all honesty."

Ho knelt and said: "Here is truly Rui-yun's husband!"

Heh rejoiced and said: "In this world only the true man of parts is capable of a great love which takes no thought of outer appearance, whether it be beautiful or ugly. Let me return with you and I will give you a beautiful wife." So together they returned.

When they arrived, Ho was about to have a feast prepared, but Heh stopped him, saying: "First I must carry out my treatment, so that he who prepares the feast will be happy." Then he asked for a basin filled with water, and with his finger wrote on the water. And he said: "Let her wash with this water, and her beauty will be restored. But one thing I ask, she must come out to thank me herself." Smiling, Ho took the basin away and waited while Rui-yun washed her face. At once her beauty shone forth pure and clear, brilliant as in the past.

Both husband and wife, their hearts overflowing with gratitude, hastened out to thank Heh—no one was there. They knew then he must have been an immortal.

* * *

THE MIXTURE AS BEFORE

Each of us finds lucidity only in those ideas which are in the same state of confusion as his own.

MARCEL PROUST

A BEVY OF BEASTS

. . . When beside thee walked the solemn Plesiosaurus,
And all around thee crept the festive Ichthyosaurus,
While from time to time above thee flew and circled
Cheerful Pterodactyls . . .

BRET HARTE

In the daies of *Augustus Ceasar* the Emperour, there was a Dolphin entred the gulfe or poole Lucrinus, which loved wondrous well a certain boy a poore mans son; who using to goe every day to schoole from Baianum to Puteoli was woont also about noone-tide to stay at the water side, and to call unto the Dolphin, *Simo, Simo* . . . at what houre soever of the day this boy lured for him . . . were the Dolphin never so close hidden in any secret or blind corner, out he would and come abroad, yea and skud amaine to this lad; and taking bread and other victuals at his hand, would gently offer him his back to mount upon, and then downe went the sharp pointed prickles of his fins, which he would put up as it were within a sheath for fear of hurting the boy. Thus when he had him once on his back, he would carry him over the broad arme of the sea as farre as Puteoli to schoole; and in like manner convey him back again home: and thus he continued for many yeeres together.

PLINY THE ELDER, *Natural History*,
translated by Philemon Holland, 1601

Yet another great truth I record in my verse,
That some Vipers are venomous, some the reverse;
A fact you may prove if you try,
By procuring two Vipers and letting them bite;
With the first you are only the worse for a fright,
But after the second you die.

HILAIRE BELLOC

Crocodile, a beast hatched of an egge, yet some of them grow to a great bignesse . . . Hauing eaten the body of a man, it will weepe ouer the head, but in fine eate the head also. Thence came the Prouerb, He shed crocodile teares, *viz.* fayned teares.

HENRY COCKERAM, *The English Dictionary*, 1623

★*Sir Henry Merrivale, jovial star in the brilliant and select company of detective heroes, is caught up in a baffling crime mystery at Tangier, where his masterly creator—whom* ARGOSY *knows too as John Dickson Carr—recently spent a holiday.*

The author, an initiate in London's exclusive Detection Club, faithfully adheres to the members' promise "never to conceal a vital clue from a reader." And so every incident counts and every word is significant. We challenge you to solve the mystery of what went on—

BEHIND THE CRIMSON BLIND

The First Part of an Exciting New Novel

by CARTER DICKSON

THE nine-thirty 'plane from Lisbon, due to arrive at Tangier two hours later, was on time; it swept in lower, broader circles above the airport. Most of the passengers, pressing their faces to the small windows of the small aircraft, were mystified or annoyed.

It was the first day in April. Below them they had expected to see Tangier, that lotus-city where you might do as you please, drowsing under a hot hard sunlight reflected from white houses, and the blue indentation of the Mediterranean where Cape Spartel marks the northernmost point in Africa. But the weather was as bitterly cold as it might have been in London or New York.

"Oh, dear!" inwardly groaned Miss Maureen Holmes.

It was only by accident that the slender, dark-haired American girl wore a fur coat. But dolefully she thought she had spent as much on clothes—and light summer, almost tropical clothes—as the cost of the whole trip.

Suddenly, and apparently out of the air, Maureen was addressed by a bass voice whose owner seemed to think he was speaking in a hushed whisper.

"S-s-t!" hissed the voice. "Oi!"

The backs of these seats in the 'plane were very high. Also, electrically illumined signs in two languages above the door to the pilot's cabin announced that you must keep your seat belt fastened. Yet the very large, stout, barrel-shaped gentleman, occupying the seat in front of Maureen, had overcome these difficulties.

Over the seat peered a face which was large, round, and square-jawed, with a polished bald head and a pair of shell-rimmed spectacles pulled down on a broad nose.

"Now listen, my wench," he began, in what he imagined to be his most polished social manner. "I've got to explain a few things. Just between ourselves . . . sh-h, now! . . . my name is . . ."

Maureen knew what it was. Her green eyes, with the long black lashes, and the broad mouth rather heavily made up against a pale complexion, held a certain anxiety as well as a secret admiration.

"But you're the Old Man," she said simply. "You're Sir Henry Merrivale."

"Well . . . now," muttered H.M., not altogether displeased. "*Sh-h!*" he added, with a look so horrible that it would have paralysed a Commando.

Against the blast of that personality, which seemed only a disembodied head glaring over the back of the seat, Maureen bristled a little. At home, at her work, she was cool and business-like and efficient, without losing any of her femininity. But now that she was abroad, her defences were lowered, her true nature emerged; and she blurted out the words involuntarily.

"You're *awful!*" she said.

"What d'ye mean, I'm awful?" yelled H.M.

Maureen Holmes, already sorry for what she had said, tried to explain.

"I mean—according to the newspapers, your—your horribly undignified conduct, and you an English nobleman, too . . ."

H.M.'s mouth fell open. "Undignified? *Me?*"

"In all the papers," insisted Maureen. "All those dreadful women! I'm sorry! And at your age, too!"

"I'm misunderstood, my wench," said H.M., his face taking on the pathetic look of one who needs to be protected in this wicked world. "Honest! I'm the most misunderstood, clean-hearted ba—believer in good that ever walked. Look at me! Take a dekko at my dial! It's all right to call me Pop, which in America they mostly did. But do I look an old rip?"

Despite her low spirits, mirth rose in the heart of Maureen Holmes.

"No, Sir Henry. I don't think you do."

"Good!" said H.M., his whole expression changing. "Now we're going to land in a minute or so"—here a heavy arm darted across the back of the seat, pointing its forefinger almost against the nose of the startled Maureen—"and you're goin' to answer me a few pretty intimate questions. What's your name, my wench?"

Maureen told him.

"Are you here in Tangier on business, or is it a holiday?"

"It's just my vacation. Two weeks clear, with the addition of time for the 'plane trip back and forth."

"What's your job at home? If any?"

"I—I'm a receptionist for Jones, Howard & Ramsbottham. You know—the big law firm. Fifth Avenue."

" Uh-huh. Where are you staying in Tangier ? "

" At the Minzah Hotel. They said it was the best in Tangier ; and I can't afford it, actually. But I just . . . I just . . ." Ruefully she threw out her arms, and smiled again.

" Hah, better and better," declared H.M. " I booked reservations there, too. Now tell me. This Plushbottom law firm—what do they pay you—taking it by the week, say ? "

Though her face grew more pink, Maureen told him.

" Uh-huh," said H.M. Again his forefinger pointed at her nose. " Then here's what I'll do. I'll triple that salary, and throw in two hundred as a bonus, if you'll pretend—only pretend—to be my secretary for a fortnight."

There was a silence, while Maureen looked back at him.

" I don't understand. Why do you want me to ' pretend ' to be your secretary ? "

" Sh-h ! " hissed H.M., peering round conspiratorially. " Nobody knows I'm in Tangier. Not a soul ! Oh, except the British Consulate ; they're sending a young feller named Bentley to meet me; but they'll keep their mouths shut. What's more, nobody's goin' to know I'm here. I mean to sit back in a deck chair and sunglasses, doin' nothing, and recuperate from my holiday in America."

" But . . ."

" Looky here," urged H.M. " You don't even have to be with me. When you go out of the hotel, just leave a note sayin' you've gone out with me ; but you don't know where we're going or when we'll come back. If I'm in the hotel when you're there, you answer the 'phone. You say I'm paralysed drunk—that's a good 'un !—or that I've got some awful infectious disease, or anything that'll keep 'em away. I'm dead serious, my wench. Will you do it ? "

Maureen bit at her underlip. " Sir Henry," she said wretchedly, " I can't." She hesitated. " You see, these two weeks are complete freedom from—well, from what you just said. They can't get you, no matter how they try. You can stick out your tongue at a ringing telephone. You haven't any responsibility towards anybody or anything."

Maureen drew a deep breath.

" It's glorious ! " she added in her low, fine voice. " If you'd ever worked for years in an office, and got to the point of thinking, ' I must remember this, I must remember that,' until you wanted to scream, then I think you'd understand."

There was another pause. Then Maureen was astonished that H.M.'s big voice could be so gentle.

" I'm sorry, too, my wench," he said, glaring at the floor. " And I'm the bloke who ought to apologize." Desperately he scratched on his head for hair that wasn't there. " Maybe the old man understands a lot more things than you think. But I say : you'll keep my secret won't you ? "

" Of course I will ! " breathed Maureen.

With a metallic sigh, the 'plane slid to a stop. There was a rippling and clashing as seat belts clattered open. The passengers,

talking loudly in at least five languages, pressed hastily towards the door.

Up rose H.M. in all massiveness. Then he reached the door and looked out.

"Oh, lord love a duck!" he whispered.

HE scarcely heard the thunder of cheers, from what seemed thousands of lusty North African throats, which nearly blew off his hat. His blurred eye first saw the two lines of red silken ropes, each line looped through an upright metal support at ten feet or so, which ran from the foot of the portable steps to the central door of the building, forming a broad path to divide the multitude. Above the central door loomed three immense messages woven in tropical flowers, their entwined hues flaming against the old green-brown hills. Each was in a different language, set one above the other:

Salud y Pesetas y Cosas Nuevas a SIR HENRY MERRIVALE!
Vive le Vieux Bonhomme, SIR HENRY MERRIVALE!

And the last greeting was in Arabic characters which we need not torture the printers to reproduce. But there was more. Beyond the right-hand red rope, motionless and without an eye-wink, stood a twenty-piece band whose instruments were mostly of brass. Even a newcomer could deduce that the band was composed of Tangier policemen. They wore white-painted helmets over dark-complexioned faces. Their uniform shirts and shorts were of light khaki; a white cross-belt passed a whistle hung round the neck on a chain and descended across the chest to a white belt with a white truncheon. Rigidly disciplined, they waited for a hidden signal.

Then the whole band burst like artillery into the face of Sir Henry Merrivale, and the tune was "God Save the King." The civilian population, on the other side of the red rope, cheered wildly. Maureen Holmes, on the step behind H.M., bent forward and spoke timorously at his ear.

"You know, Sir Henry," she said, "I'm afraid *somebody* knows you're here."

"Well . . . now," growled the great man, obviously of two minds about how to treat this. Then he was galvanized. "Oi! My wench! Look there!"

It was the crowning triumph, *le moment suprême.* At the central door of the airport stooped two Arab boys, perhaps nine or ten years old, in jacket and breeches suspiciously white. Both wore the red tarbush, with tassel, which nowadays means only that the wearer is a Mohammedan. And they stooped on either side of what looked like an immense and broad roll of red carpet.

With a concerted word to each other the boys darted forward like monkeys. The red carpet unrolled swiftly towards the portable steps.

"Hem!" observed Sir Henry Merrivale, with a strange new note in his voice.

With a casual gesture, like a magician handing a used prop to his female assistant, H.M. offered his hat to Maureen. The remaining steps he descended at a lordly and pigeon-toed walk. Then, putting

his hand on his heart, he bowed left and right as low as his corporation would permit.

" *Muchas gracias,*" he bellowed. " *Je vous remercie.*"

Maureen, feeling guilty because she held H.M.'s hat, stole down the stairs to stand behind him.

" I dunno what we're goin' to do now," admitted the distinguished visitor. " It's been a fine show, but where's the M.C. ? "

Relief, however, was in sight. Out and under the right-hand rope there ducked and stood up a lean young man who was a little above middle height. Though he was faintly swarthy and had black hair, there was about him not the slightest suggestion of the quality called oiliness. His tweed sports coat, with grey flannel trousers and a sombre dark-blue tie, might have come from Bond Street. Though his best friend could not have called him handsome, his thin face showed traces of an intelligence and humour which were masked, as a result of his official duties, by a formal courtesy close to stateliness.

In his left hand he held a small sheaf of papers. He bowed formally to H.M., and then raised the red-brown eyes which were his best feature.

" Sir Henry," he said, in English without a trace of foreign accent, " may I be the first to welcome you ? I am Juan Alvarez, the Commandant."

" Y'know, son," he said, dubiously tugging at his ear lobe, " this is uncommon handsome of you. It really is. But are you sure you're settin' off illuminations for the right man ? "

" Sir Henry ! " interrupted a new and feminine voice. A girl ducked under the rope and ran towards them.

The newcomer was clearly English, clearly in her middle-twenties, and clearly friendly. Her thick fine-spun hair, of a truly golden colour, was worn long in a page-boy bob. Under thin and arched but unplucked eyebrows, she had dark blue eyes with heavy lids. The slightest exertion flushed her fair skin. Though she wore very little powder and no lipstick, there flowed from her an aura of sheer femininity like a physical touch. She was hardly conscious of this, though an outsider would have sworn differently. Over her shoulders she had thrown a light coat. But her Paris dressmaker, in the Place de la France, had designed for her an unorthodox silk summer frock with a deep V between the breasts, and clinging tightly to her admirable figure.

" You must forgive me," stated the coldly formal Juan Alvarez. " May I present . . .? "

" I'm Paula Bentley," cried the newcomer, and attached herself to H.M.'s arm. " Bill (my husband, you know) was supposed to meet you. But old J.—that's the consul—wouldn't let him go. Will I do instead ? "

" Oh, my dolly ! " said H.M., powerfully dazzled.

" You see," Paula explained, " they're always sending poor Bill " —unreserved love made rich her voice whenever she spoke of Bill— " to some dreadful places all over the world to write a report about mud or bananas or machinery or something. The report is always miles

long; and old J. wants to study every word. And of course Bill returned only three days ago, and we . . . I mean . . .” Paula's face went scarlet, and she stopped.

“Sure, my dolly,” H.M. soothed her. “You've got a lot of intimate talking to do; that's it.”

“Well . . . something like that. Yes. Thanks.” Happy again, Paula Bentley suddenly became conscious of Maureen on the other side of H.M. “Er—” she began.

Maureen, throwing back her fur coat still further, lowered the lashes over her green eyes. Casually she strolled forward, and took affectionate possession of H.M.'s left arm.

“I am Sir Henry's secretary,” she announced, in her receptionist's beautiful voice.

Dead silence.

Alvarez inclined his head in stately fashion towards Maureen, and for the first time showed fine teeth in a smile.

“I fear it is my fault, Miss . . .?”

“Holmes,” grunted H.M. “Maureen Holmes.”

“It is my fault, Miss Holmes, that we were unaware of your arrival. May I bid you, in the name of my—my authority, the most cordial welcome?”

“*Hoy!*” roared Sir Henry Merrivale. “Do I walk across that red carpet, or don't I?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“What I mean,” said H.M., instantly aloof and disdainful, “is that we've got to get our passports stamped in there, and have the customs people look at our luggage. Those passengers you lined up against the 'plane are goin' stark gibberin' mad, I tell you! They can't leave until we do.”

Unobtrusively Alvarez snapped his fingers. Maureen, who saw this, observed that an inconspicuous man in plain clothes melted away from the civilian crowd.

“As for your passports, sir,” continued Alvarez, slightly lifting one shoulder, “I can have them stamped for you and Miss Holmes in one minute. Our friends the French, who control all custom houses both here and at the port, have given you diplomatic immunity; your luggage will not be touched. Over there,” he nodded to the right, beyond the band, “waits the motor car in which I shall be happy to drive you to your destination. Another car, of course, will follow us with your luggage and that of Miss Holmes.”

H.M. seemed dazed.

“Looky here, son. Are you *sure* you've got the right man?”

“Quite sure, sir. If you will be so kind as to walk across to the airport amid your admirers, you will confer on them a great favour. A bow, a smile, perhaps even an encouraging word. Miss Holmes, will you be good enough to give me Sir Henry's hat? Thank you.”

Paula Bentley, though rather subdued, was enjoying herself. Maureen was not so sure. But they both did as they were told.

“Forward!” cried Alvarez.

With full flourish the band boomed and brayed ; the audience went mad with delight. Majestically bowing right and left, H.M. moved forward at a pigeon-toed walk, with a pretty girl clinging to each arm. The band struck up " The Old Bull and Bush."

"Regard there the old goodman," shouted an ecstatic voice in French. " To Tangiér he brings *two* poules, eh ? It is magnificent, that ! "

" *Y bellas muchachas con tetas grandes !* " yelled a delighted Spaniard, pointing to what should have been the rest of the flower message.

" Allah ! Allah ! Bless the wine-drinking unbeliever with many sons ! "

As the dauntless three neared the glass doors, newspaper flash bulbs glared and rippled, H.M. was borne backwards through the central door as the band crashed into " Knocked 'Em in the Old Kent Road."

" Oh, God," whispered Paula Bentley. Puffing out her cheeks, shaking back the heavy golden hair, Paula gave H.M. a curious look. Then, light and graceful, she raced off towards a public telephone to reach her Bill at the British Consulate.

Alvarez took from Maureen a green passport, and from H.M. a blue one. Hurrying towards a large cubicle, in frosted glass above the middle, Alvarez put his head through a window. Maureen and H.M. stood in a core of silence amid huge noise outside.

" Now," said H.M., " I'm-goin' to ask *you* a question, and I want the truth. Why did you suddenly change and decide you'd pretend to be my secretary after all ? "

" Well," and Maureen moistened her lips, " at first I thought I couldn't. Absolutely couldn't ! And then . . . Listen, Sir Henry ! I know you've got all the brains in the word, and everything like that. But sometimes you're so—so *childish.* I was afraid if I didn't look after you, that the first crook you met would fool you or swindle you."

There was a terrible silence. H.M. folded his arms.

" ' Childish ' eh ? " he murmured. " I'm going to *show* you ! "

Twenty seconds later they stood beside the largest and most modern of Packard cars. A little distance away stood a very modern Buick, in whose back seat sat a bronzed old gentleman who wore the green tarbush which indicates a holy pilgrimage to Mecca. H.M. eyed that green fez with a longing bordering on greed ; Maureen could almost see the clicking thoughts which transferred it to his own head. Behind them was a new Ford station wagon, into which short muscular Arabs were piling luggage.

Opening the back door of the Packard, Alvarez handed in Paula Bentley, who was an old acquaintance ; he even managed to shove in H.M. But, when he opened the front door, Alvarez lost his suavity and even became awkward.

" Miss Holmes, I trust—that is to say, for example : will you do me the honour of sitting beside me when I drive ? "

" I'd love to," Maureen answered conventionally ; but even this had its effect on the Commandant.

Slamming the door, he hurried round to the other side and slipped

into the front seat. Moving into top gear almost at once, Alvarez sent the powerful car whizzing along a none-too-even road at such blazing speed that even the tumult at the airport faded away.

FOR some time, under a damp overcast sky, they shot down a long and winding road without a word spoken.

H.M. was the first to recover the power of speech. "Do they issue drivers' licences to every loony like you?" he remarked conversationally.

"But I am considered the most careful and moderate of drivers," protested Alvarez, with surprise and obvious truth.

"Uh-huh," commented H.M., and glanced out of the rear window. "Well, that little luggage van is after us right enough. Did you tell 'em we were goin' to the Minzah Hotel?"

"I said nothing," Alvarez observed slowly, "about driving to the Minzah . . . I said, if you remember, that I would drive you to your destination."

The car flashed between a pair of gateposts, attacked an almost perpendicular gravel path, shivered violently and stopped. Alvarez faced his passengers.

"Sir Henry, I assure you—and Miss Holmes—that you are not being kidnapped. You will not be harmed or molested in any way." His voice grew intense. "I ask only that here you will have perhaps ten, perhaps twenty minutes' talk with a certain gentleman. Afterwards you may, of course, do as you like."

"Look, what's all this mysterious hocus-pocus . . ."

"There are reasons, sir! Believe me!"

"Oh, son, it's all right!" said H.M. "I enjoy a little *causerie* with anybody."

Alvarez, so relieved that faint sweat appeared on his swarthy forehead, sprang down and opened the door for him.

THE House of the Wild Olives, very high and very broad, was of white dressed stone as smooth as concrete; against it many lines of windows, with wooden shutters painted green, stood out vividly. The actual ground floor, you could see, was a kind of cellar: it contained only kitchens and kitchen offices. The true ground floor, with the front door, was above it. Across this had been built a broad terrace with a marble balustrade, along which stood at intervals smallish marble nymphs and vases. A stone staircase against the front wall went up to the balcony; and beneath the balcony had been built a broad garage.

"Sir," Alvarez was eager, on wires, "you see the stone staircase going up to the terrace above us now. There you will find . . ."

"Sure, sure. I can find my way."

"Thank you. I shall take the ladies for a short stroll, explain the situation to them, and return."

"Take your time, son."

H.M. nodded, setting his hat at a more seemly angle. He found the floor of the balcony—and stopped short. From this high place,

the view should have been seen by the romantic Maureen. But even H.M. paused.

One marble nymph on the balustrade wore a long garment of yellow flowers. A marble vase foamed thick, light-purple blossoms, which spilled over to the floor. Beyond the balustrade, Tangier fell away in ridges of dense dark green far down to the long, blue shimmering bay and the dark hills rising beyond. The slope was thickened with red-roofed white houses, looking from here like toys of white or yellow-brown or pink. One sole jarring note was a water tower, seeming high only because it was on a ridge, but dwarfing the slender brick towers of mosques. Far to the left rose the battlements of the Casbah, the ancient Arab Quarter.

But it was not only the view. It was the air, the very feel and texture of the air, entwining the languor of the Mediterranean with the harshness of North Africa. It was a leopard's skin, all claws removed. It was bright, timeless, proud, yielding. You drank that air, and were at one with the pagan.

H.M., suddenly waking up, removed the cigar from his mouth and looked round.

In the middle of the terrace stood a wicker table whose red top was loaded with bottles, glasses, an ice bucket and a soda syphon, as well as a very neat pile of reports and dossiers. Beside the table, having stood up from his chair, was a short, stoutish man, capless but otherwise in full khaki uniform including Sam Browne belt, with the red tabs of a staff officer and the insignia of a Colonel in the Belgian Army.

His large head was covered with short white hair cut *en brosse*, showing the pink scalp underneath. His face was red and jovial; even as he stood at attention, so that the stoutness round the waist made his uniform tunic stick forward like a strut, he fired off a string of chuckles. His bushy eyebrows were black streaked with white. What you first noticed was the twinkle and intelligence in his blue eyes.

" Sir Henry Merrivale ? " he asked, in a gruff but genial voice.

" *Ca va, mon gars?* " returned H.M., with his deplorable taxi-driver familiarity. " *Votre femme n'a pas couché sur le pan de votre chemise? C'est vrai : je suis le vieux bonhomme.*"

" Oh, I speak a little English," said the other, putting his head on one side with the concealed glee of one who knows he speaks it very well. " Come, let us talk in English ! It will be good practice for me."

" Fine ! " said H.M. " They tell me I got an Addisonian purity in my style. You remember what I say, and bob's-your-uncle."

The other, looking slightly puzzled, covered this with a string of chuckles.

" Then I present myself," he beamed. " I am Colonel Duroc."

Colonel Duroc shot out his hand at the same time as H.M. Each man instinctively realized in the other a kindred spirit.

" Ah, but I mislay my hospitality ! *Allons prendre un verre !* " he cried, with a phrase as truly Belgian as the Boulevard Adolphe Max.

" That suits me, Colonel. I mean, *est-ce qu'il y a du visky-soda ?* "

" *Mais naturellement. Vous êtes anglais, voyons. Ici vous voyez le Johnnie Walker, le John Haig, le White Horse . . .*"

Two minutes later they were seated opposite each other, close to the balustrade in full sun, with tall glasses and ash trays on side tables.

" My friend ! " Duroc began abruptly, taking the cigar out of his mouth. " Before I say what I wish to say, I must explain to you a small deception which was played on you."

" I've been waitin' for that explanation," replied H.M. in a sinister voice. " Maybe you thought it was funny, but I didn't."

There was a slight pause before Duroc replied.

" I am what you would call in London the Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police."

" Yes. I sort of guessed that."

Old Duroc's red face brightened.

" Observe," he cried, " this fine house. It is not mine. My house is in repairs ; my wife has departed for a holiday in Belgium. I lease this house from a good friend of mine, also English, who is also absent from Tangier. Is it not large, full of valuable things, with all the comfort modern ? *Hein ?* "

" Sure. It's first-rate. What about it ? "

Colonel Duroc, with deep solemnity, pressed his glass of visky-soda against his heart.

" When I hear you are coming to Tangier, and to a hotel at that, I say no. No, no, no ! Hotels ! " added Duroc, holding his nose in disgust. " While you are in Tangier, my friend, you must be my guest here."

H.M. grunted and looked at the floor. The old sinner was rather touched.

" Y'know, Colonel, that's very decent of you. I appreciate it."

" Only half an hour ago do I learn that you had brought with you your—ah—secretary. Yes. ' Well, well, well ? ' said I ; ' the lady must be my guest too. We will put them,' said I, ' in adjoining rooms upstairs, purely,' Duroc added in haste, with a delicacy which could give no offence, ' as a matter of convenience, should he wish to dictate letters.' Yes. *Voilà !* You see ? "

H.M. threw the end of his cigar over the balustrade. " I can't speak for the gal, Colonel, but I'd be howlingly pleased to accept your invitation."

" Ah ! Now I am delight ! "

" Now who is this bloke Alvarez ? " said H.M.

The bushy eyebrows went up in surprise.

" But he is the Commandant of Police ! In criminal matters, my right hand." Colonel Duroc frowned. " And yet often I do not understand him. It seems to me he is a rowboat."

" A . . . what d'ye mean, a rowboat ? "

" Ah, bah ! A man of machinery. You press a button ; he walks. You press another button—"

" Oh, son ! You mean a robot."

" But that is what I say : a rowboat." Duroc spoke somewhat irritably, and his short white hair bristled up. " Juan Alvarez is very, very intelligent. Like that." Duroc snapped his fingers three times. " Also all dubious characters are terrified of him. He is a famous

boxer and swordsman ; worst of all, he is bad in a street fight with a truncheon, because he has no mercy. Yes. This is puzzling. In my younger days, alas ! I have often run mad with a bayonet and think nothing. Yet to punish with the blood cool . . . Yes, this is puzzling."

H.M. made fussed gestures.

" But stop a bit, son ! Alvarez is a Spaniard, ain't he ? And you are a Belgian—"

Chuckling again, the Commissioner of Police took a deep pull at his visky-soda and set it down.

" All my detective officers are Spaniards : all intelligent and well trained. My policemen—*les agents, vous comprenez*—are Spanish and even with some Arabs. They are trained and drilled like an army. Yes, by God ! And as good as an army ! " Pride rang in Duroc's voice. " Each man must fluently speak French, Spanish, and Arabic. Should he commit any discourtesy, let him beware ! "

" But, wait a minute, son ! What I wanted to know . . ."

Wheeling round, Duroc strode over to H.M. and stood in front of him.

" Tonight," he said formally, " there is in Tangier perhaps the most clever criminal who ever lived. I do not speak lightly, no."

" Uh-huh ? " said H.M. " When did this bloke get to Tangier ? "

" This morning. On the same 'plane as yourself."

" *What's that, son ?* "

" If this man were an ordinary criminal, we could deal with him. But he is not. His feats, I swear it, defy belief. Veritably he is a ghost ; he disappears, and makes things disappear with him ! Frankly, my friend, I ask for your help."

Flipping his cigar over the balustrade, Colonel Duroc spread out his hands.

" You are the Maestro," he said. " You are the Old Man. These magics are for you the food and drink. If you do not help, I fear we shall have on our hands, perhaps even tonight, a situation which I can only call . . . impossible."

THERE was a long silence.

" Colonel," murmured H.M., " I can't do it ; and that's flat. Maybe you were right about my cussedness, but I can't. I explained all about it to Maureen Holmes today. I can't say another word."

But he did. For twenty minutes, in fact, he gave a powerful oration covering the same things and more, while Duroc listened respectfully. The Ford station wagon, scarcely heard by either but carrying H.M.'s and Maureen's luggage, clattered into the garage below, after which invisible Arab servants bore the luggage up through a door in the garage to the house. When he wound up his peroration, H.M. was in a mighty state of martyrdom.

Duroc was worried. But he found inspiration.

" Let's take another glass ! " he exclaimed.

" Good ! " thundered H.M.

Hastily snatching up the two tall empty glasses, Duroc filled each exactly half full of whisky. He was just flicking a spectral dash of soda into them when light, hurrying footfalls, the tread of youth, ascended the stone steps outside.

Paula Bentley stood on the red tiles of the balcony, her fair complexion heightened by the wind. Colonel Duroc shook an admonitory finger at her. But Paula, smiling, merely ran over and kissed him on the cheek.

" Ha, ha ! " exclaimed Colonel Duroc.

Behind Paula—as she had arranged—appeared Maureen and Alvarez. Maureen's black hair and green eyes made her seem like stained glass in a Spanish cathedral ; But not now : she was too alive, too excited. As Alvarez bent over her, only someone very close could have caught his cryptic word : " Caravel ? "

" Well—yes ! " whispered Maureen. " Unless I have work to do."

" But you are not his . . . I mean, not his sec— Never mind. You have told me ! "

Maureen hurried forward, looking at Paula.

" Commandant Alvarez," she said, " has taken us for a lovely walk along the Old Mountain Road. Even places from which we could see the town . . . Oh ! "

Maureen saw the chuckling Colonel Duroc, and stopped short.

" Miss Holmes," Alvarez said, " may I present Colonel Georges Duroc, our Commissioner of Police ? "

" *Enchanté, mademoiselle !* " said Duroc, taking her extended hand and lifting it to his lips.

" *Très heureuse, monsieur !* " replied Maureen.

Whereupon Colonel Duroc, seeing his subordinate, became stern.

" Commandant Alvarez ! "

" Yes, sir ? "

" I find, Commandant, that your small idea of a small deception played at the airport has misshot. Your bungling today," elaborated Colonel Duroc, with great unfairness, " has quite rightly made Sir Henry refuse to help us with our case. Sir Henry Merrivale . . . "

H.M. stood with his back to the balustrade, chewing some blue flowers. Over these his eyes never wavered in a look, both thoughtful and malignant, at Maureen Holmes.

" ' Childish,' " he observed, with the air of one who quotes. " ' Childish,' hey ? "

He addressed Colonel Duroc in an offhand, apologetic manner.

" If it's all the same to you, Colonel," he said, " I'd like to change my mind. I'd like to give you all the help I can with this ghost-feller case. And we'll nab the blighter good and proper."

Colonel Duroc jumped up from his chair.

" Grand God ! " he said. " If my small organization, with your help, can capture Iron Chest and make stupid the great police forces of Rome and Paris, then I shall die happy in a dog kennel ! " He paused, swallowing. " When do you wish to begin ? "

" Now. Trot out every report, every bit of evidence, anything at

all you've got on the ghost bloke. Clear away the rest of these people except my secretary."

"Well, *I* must fly anyway," cried Paula. "I promised to pick up Bill. Colonel Duroc, may I run upstairs and 'phone for a taxi?"

"Nonsense, nonsense!" said the harassed Colonel. "Commandant Alvarez shall drive you down in my Packard."

Paula Bentley slipped across to Maureen.

"My dear," she said with her usual sincere forthrightness, "on any other night, of course, we should have taken you out somewhere. Will tomorrow night do?"

"I'd love to!"

An insufferable voice had boomed above the clatter of talk.

"That's straight, Colonel," said Sir Henry Merrivale. "I'll make a little bet, say a thousand quid to ten, we nail this blighter in forty-eight hours."

Alvarez extended his hand, which H.M. shook.

"*I* won't take your bet, sir," he said, "because I want you to win it. It was jolly decent of you, offering to help us."

"Not a bit, son." Deliberately H.M. raised his voice. "I'm goin' to teach a lesson to a certain young woman who mistakes a fine natural dignity, sort of, for sheer cloth-headedness and says I'm *awful!*"

"Excuse me, sir." Alvarez first hesitated, then poured out words frankly. "Between ourselves, I know Miss Holmes isn't . . . related to you in any way, so to speak. But will you keep her here all evening taking notes?"

"Goin' on the razzle-dazzle, son?" inquired H.M., with interest and approval. "No. She'll be here only a couple of hours."

"Razzle-dazzle?" Alvarez was horrified. "No, no. Only to dinner."

Colonel Duroc was smacking his hands together.

"Commandant Alvarez; you will drive Mrs. Bentley to the British Consulate. Then you will go to the 7th Arrondissement Station, and send the car back here. No one has telephoned to me about the passengers' luggage," he added cryptically, "but it may take a long time. Perhaps you will have news first. In any case, telephone me in one hour. Go!"

In another two minutes the terrace was quiet. Colonel Duroc's Packard roared backwards out of the garage. H.M. sat down in his chair by the balustrade, adjusted his hat, and lit another cigar. Maureen drew a wicker chair near the table. For a moment H.M. smoked in silence.

"So you decided to stay here, eh?" he asked her.

Maureen already had her answer prepared.

"It's much better than paying an enormous hotel bill, isn't it?"

STRUTTING footsteps approached through the marble hall. Colonel Duroc carried under one arm a chest of iron or steel, perhaps two feet long by one foot high, with curious carvings which the watchers could not make out. The Colonel deposited it with a

bump—its dull polish made it seem iron rather than steel—near the front door.

Then he strutted out on the terrace, sat down by his documents, and took out a pencil.

"Now we come to business!" he said. "Where, my friend, do you wish to commence?"

"Don't make a note," H.M. levelled his arm at Maureen, "unless I say, 'That's important, put it down.' You're challenging me, hey? Then you'll see how the Old Man works."

He turned to Colonel Duroc.

"First, son, a bit of background. Has this feller got a name by the way?"

"Unfortunately, none that we know. The police of many cities merely call him 'Iron Chest.' His record in not much more than a year, between the 27th February, 1949, and the 1st April, now 1950, has been amazing, *épatant!*"

"Sure, sure." H.M. puffed at the cigar drowsily, not much impressed. "You've said he can do this, or do that; but what does he actually do? What's his racket?"

"He is the most dangerous and modern burglar now at large."

H.M. groaned.

"Oh, my son! I've said before that the professional criminal is the dullest dog on earth!"

Colonel Duroc smiled a catlike smile.

"Believe me, my friend, not this one."

"H'mf. Well. No photographs or fingerprints, I s'pose?"

"Alas, none."

"Any good descriptions by an eye witness?"

"Alas, not any good one at all. He has been seen many times, on occasion at fairly close distance. Only once has he been seen face to face, and that . . . Well, you will hear."

H.M.'s eyes narrowed.

"Now, Colonel. Has he got any peculiarities—you know what I mean—by which you can pick him as the particular man who did the particular job?"

"Indeed, yes!"

Here Duroc carefully stressed the points on each finger.

"First, he has never been known to—what do you say in England?—crack a private house. Always he cracks a modern small bank or a modern small jeweller. Second, always he uses an electric drill on the safe, in itself an unusual thing. Even this drill is unusual, called a Spandau after the German Spandau machine-gun. Three times he has broken a drill, having to replace it with another and leaving the first behind. The drill mechanism can be made to march on any current; you plug it in any socket. By damn, this is good!

"Third," pursued the Colonel, "at jewellers he takes only diamonds cut or uncut. Nothing else. At small banks he touches no gold or silver. Only banknotes whose numbers are not registered. For example, my friend, in England, is it true that the one-pound notes are not registered and cannot be traced?"

H.M. nodded, chewing the cigar.

" So ! Good ! With our man, it is the same principle of currency. Though he make a good haul of diamonds, and he crack two jewellers to one bank, yet with money in any country he leave behind a big profit for a safe one. Now, please, your attention. Fourth and last ! "

Colonel Duroc's expression grew intent.

" On every one of his raids, *every* one, he has carried under his left arm the iron chest such as you see now in the hall."

" Hold on, now ! " muttered H.M., and slowly rose to his feet. " Write that down," he told Maureen ; " it's important, though maybe not in the way you think." He turned back to Duroc. " But, if that's the chest he carried, how do you happen to have it ? "

" Because, my friend, in two cities—once in Amsterdam, once in Paris—he has had to drop and leave a chest when almost the police get him. And we know, from a report with which I will not trouble you now, he has four such chests. All more or less alike, all carved in much the same way. So he carry another one, when he raid again."

" But, burn me, why ? "

" Aha ! " exclaimed the Colonel, who had been lurking in ambush for that question. " That is the first problem we have. This chest is not a mighty and overbearing weight. It is made of sheet iron rolled thin. It can be carried under the arm, though with some difficulty and awkwardness. Now diamonds he could carry in his pockets. Banknotes could be fitted into a small attaché case. Yet he carries this chest ! In every way it hampers him ; it endangers him in a quick away-get . . ."

" Don't you mean getaway ? " Maureen asked with real innocence.

" Pah ! This English ! I make myself clear, God love a goose ? Yes ! Well. I repeat : this chest halts his getaway, it obstructs his gun hand—for I tell you he is a killer—and, when two discarded chests are found, they are empty. It is not at all necessary. Yet he always carries it. Why ? "

There was a silence.

" I want more information ! " H.M. said querulously, and took the cigar out of his mouth.

Inclining his head, Duroc took out and opened a brown folder, which contained sheets of typewritten flimsy.

" Excellent ! " he said. " I should like to recount a typical Iron Chest adventure, the more maddening because it was the only time his face was ever seen at close range. It occurred in Brussels, my own city. I was there at the time, with my wife, on holiday, and so was Mark Hammond."

" Stop ! Who's Mark Hammond ? "

" He is a good fellow," Duroc returned promptly. " He writes modern science books, and lives here at Tangier. He is American, with excellent manners. Perhaps he drink a little . . ."

" Uh-huh. Never mind Hammond. Get back to the crime."

" Sir Henry, are you familiar with Brussels ? Do you know the Bourse ? "

H.M. reflected, still smoking.

" The Bourse, hey ? I've never been inside it. But I remember, years ago, a little street full of cafés with pavement tables ; it was in front of the Bourse, and just on the right hand of it as you faced the building. You couldn't buy anything but wine or beer or apéritifs there. They even iced the soda syphons, curse 'em ; and you got the shock of your life when you pressed the syphon handle and out squirted lemonade."

" You have it, you have it ! The rue du Midi ! "

" 'Course," said H.M., " you could always buy whisky at a shop and drink it at home."

" But attend ! Just beyond the rue du Midi, and along the right hand side of the Bourse itself, there is a quiet, narrow little street with trees and street lamps. There are only dignified homes, with a few shops of the first class. But one is the great Parisian jewel firm of Bernstein et Cié., which has a branch at Brussels and another here at Tangier.

" Now picture what happens, on a warm spring night. Many people rustle their newspapers or rattle their glasses outside the cafés, separated only by the bustling crossway of the rue Neuve from that silent street of trees made green by lamps. It is ten o'clock on the night of May 5, last year."

Duroc's bushy grey-black eyebrows drew together. He rippled his thumb across the typewritten flimsies.

" All the Brussels police are alert for Iron Chest, since he has cracked two nights before. Yet at ten o'clock not a hundred feet from the nearest café, he is already at work on the great steel front doors of Bernstein et Cie. To open such doors, with picklock or form of key, is very difficult. The slightest touch will set off the burglar alarm. But it is not uncommon in these days.

" Well, Iron Chest does it. He slips inside, leaving the doors very slightly open because he wish no more trouble with that lock. The premises, the doors, are too thick for anyone to hear his electric drill. He takes fifty uncut diamonds ; nothing else. And why ? That is easy. Well-known jewels in a shop are too obvious. A good diamond cutter and polisher, who keeps his mouth shut, can make those little grey lumps unrecognizable. Iron Chest moves for the doors.

" And then . . . A policeman, an *agent* named Laurant, was pacing along the same side of the street. He saw the line of shadow where the outer steel doors were not quite shut. He knew there was no other entrance or exit. He stood and waited.

" One of the steel doors very softly opens. Someone, carrying the iron chest under his left arm, steps out on his left foot so that he can manœuvre the chest outwards in a straight line. And the policeman comes face to face with the unknown.

" The policeman dives straight for the chest, which is longways in front of him. He remembers getting a good grip over and under the chest, feeling even the carved monkeys, and desiring to drag it away because he thinks it contains loot. He remembers raising his head and getting a good look at the unknown's face, by the light of the

street lamp. Then the other man's right hand whips up and over, holding a Browning .32 automatic. And he shoots the policeman pointblank into the forehead."

"There's something very rummy about that, son," objected a scowling H.M. "If this copper was polished off like that, he's dead. How can he 'remember' to tell you anything?"

Duroc's mouth made an ironic grimace.

"Because he did not die."

"Oh, ah. You mean there was a . . .?"

"Exactly. Your knowledge of medical jurisprudence—are you not a physician as well as a barrister?—will remind you of many victims who have received a worse injury to the head than a light .32 bullet, yet have survived?"

"Sure."

"Yet in most cases," frowned Duroc, "they are not quite mentally the same. They are not mad, no. In most things they are clear enough. But their minds do not run always on a plain track. Thus the policeman, Laurant, is fairly clear about everything up to the time he saw the iron chest; and at once the man fired. Then —no! This shot brought on a kind of paralysis. He cannot recall any detail of Iron Chest's face. If the man stood before him now, that policeman could not identify him.

"But hear what happen, a demi-second after the shot is fired . . . *Quelle sensation!*

"A half-second after the shot, those in the cafés leap up or dash out to see. Those in the rue Neuve, which is a transverse street even closer, turn round to look. Many persons see the policeman stagger back from the pavement into the road, slip, and fall on his face. But nobody, nobody at all, sees Iron Chest. He has vanished."

Colonel Duroc raised his hand as though taking an oath.

"It is the truth, I tell you. All people rush into that little street *en masse*, like a blockade. Iron Chest does not run or even walk towards them. Other people, at the other end of a short street, have heard the shot and hurry from the other direction. Iron Chest does not go towards *them*. He does not step backwards through the open door of the jeweller's, because they think of this and search. All, of course, have read about him in the newspapers . . ."

"Put that down," H.M. interposed suddenly, and snapped his fingers towards Maureen. "That last sentence. It might be important."

Duroc gently closed the folder.

"A pretty problem, eh?" His chuckle was not mirthful, but tinged with satire. "Our first ghost glimpse."

"Cor!" grunted H.M., in a voice which secretly delighted Maureen. He was sitting with his elbow on the arm of his chair, chin in hand, a mass of concentration.

Maureen looked down at the long light dying over the city. Irresistibly her thoughts drifted. Tonight she was having dinner with Juan Alvarez at—abruptly her thoughts stopped, and her memory began to grope wildly. C-a . . . C-o . . . C-i . . . Ciro's? That would be more like it.

"Colonel Duroc," she said in a low voice, "I'm sorry to intrude like this, but is there a restaurant in town called Ciro's?"

"Yes, yes, an excellent one! You must tell Henri I sent you." The Colonel, always gallant, beamed at her; but he immediately turned back to H.M. "Come, my friend! Have you any question?" he added slyly.

"Well, yes," said H.M., and scowled. "Tell me this. Was there any rain on the night it happened?"

"I cannot understand, why you ask. And I do not remember. But I will find it in the report."

Opening the folder, Colonel Duroc began slowly and carefully to go through the typewritten pages, missing nothing. H.M. turned a lordly look towards Maureen.

"Better write down both question and answer, my wench," he said offhandedly. "It's very important."

Maureen's first impulse was to break the pencil in two pieces, and fling both of them into the face of Sir Henry Merrivale. The old so-and-so was doing this deliberately to annoy her. She couldn't stand this! She wouldn't stand it!

At this moment, the Arab fat'ma appeared in the doorway, pushing a white-painted iron tea wagon whose wheels rattled like the plates of sandwiches on its top. On the shelf underneath lay a carelessly opened copy of today's *Tangier Gazette*.

The fat'ma rattled the tea wagon to the right of Maureen's chair, and padded away. But it gave Maureen an opportunity to conceal her own furious face. Bending over to adjust the newspaper, Maureen was about to close it when her eye caught a small advertisement. She read it again. There!

Colonel Duroc uttered an exclamation.

"It is incredible!" he said, looking up from the typewritten flimsies. "Sir Henry! On that day in Brussels there were several small showers. The last shower, so light that it did not even trouble the café-loungers under their awnings, began about nine-fifty P.M. and ended at about ten-five P.M., some twenty minutes before the firing of the shot. Our burglar worked for some time on that safe, of course. But how a fiend's name did you know this?"

"Hem," said H.M., with a modest cough.

In the silence they could hear faintly what sounded like the noise of an ancient rattletrap car toiling up the tunnel towards the house. Maureen, still furious, carefully noted down an address from the advertisement.

"But of course," smiled the Colonel, "this disappearance in Brussels is nothing. In Paris, he made a whole table load of diamonds disappear from sight."

THE sky over Tangier, at half-past ten that night, was a soft arch of bluish-black with small stars so brilliant that they seemed pierced through it. It was many miles from the House of Wild Olives.

The only light came from a lantern hung under the stairs. Beside it, on a bench, drowsed an elderly Arab in a white *jelab* with a

peaked hood. And, on either side of a round table at the front, Paula and Bill Bentley sat and looked at each other over forgotten glasses.

"Bill," Paula began tentatively.

"Yes, my baggage?"

"Darling," she said, "you're worried about something. What is it?"

She studied him, as he sat across from her in his open-necked shirt and his old grey flannels. Bill's brown hair was cut short in military fashion. His eyes were brown. Though he was not particularly good looking, which for some reason delighted Paula, he had a humorous mouth and cleft chin. Unlike Alvarez, say, he had broad shoulders and a tapering waist; but he was probably not much taller or heavier than the Commandant.

An outsider would have thought him the average sort of fellow with good background, good public school, good university: dependable, but not very ambitious. And this, in a sense, was true. What Paula knew, together with only old J. and a few members of the British Consulate, was the lightning-swift quality of his brain. He could arrange facts as a conjuror handles cards; he could draw the gist from a report with one glance down each page; he could supply, out of a remarkable memory, any fact required on any subject.

But now Paula said, "You're worried about something. What is it?"

At the end of such a noble evening, Bill considered such a question unfair. Borrowing a car from Mark Hammond, he and Paula had dined at the Ali Baba. Then they had driven, over twisted roads and ways, down to the stretch of a deserted beach. The long flat water ran and foamed swiftly up a flat sand beach, all black and white. They swam far out into the warm sea. They made love on the beach until both were tired, relaxed, and a little drowsy. Then they had decided to drink mint tea on top of the old tower.

"Look here, baggage," said Bill, "why should you think I'm worried about anything?"

"Because I know," Paula answered simply. "I can always tell, can't I?"

"H'm," said Bill. She nearly always could, at that.

She pressed her cheek against his, and whispered.

"Darling. What's *really* worrying you? It's something about money, isn't it?"

Bill gave a start, and almost drew back his arm from her shoulders. He did not want to tell her the truth as yet, though there was no reason why he should not have done so. Pay in the Consular (which, like the Diplomatic, is controlled by the Foreign Office) is seldom large, but Bill had a few hundred a year of his own. He searched his mind to find some excuse which, while convincing, must also sound true. And he found it.

"Didn't you notice, Paula, that I had to borrow a car from Mark Hammond?"

"I didn't notice anything," murmured Paula. "I hardly know what we had to eat at the restaurant."

"Then I regret to tell you that Lothario went to his well-earned rest this afternoon. He conked out and expired just at the entrance to Colonel Duroc's garage."

Lothario was their car. A louder, noisier, more sputtering little four-seater than Lothario would have been difficult to find. He had been ready for the scrap heap years before Bill bought him.

"Oh, dear," said Paula, pressing closer to him. Then her eyes opened wide. "But when were you at Colonel Duroc's house?"

"They told me," said Bill, "that I got there about twenty minutes after you'd left in Duroc's Packard. We must have passed each other on the road."

"But why on earth did you go up there?"

"You 'phoned me from the airport, remember? About the stupendous welcome of Sir Henry Merrivale?" Bill smiled. "Also, that you thought they were luring him to Colonel Duroc's house, and inveigling him into helping with the Iron Chest case?"

Paula nodded. Excitement had come into Bill's voice.

"Aside from wanting to carry you away like young Lochinvar," he said, "I was a bit curious to meet the Old Maestro himself. He was there on the terrace, right enough. And Colonel Duroc. And a Miss Holmes, who's rather attractive."

"She's nice," said Paula. "I mean, she really *is* nice."

"But anyway all I did was 'phone for a taxi. Then I had to keep it waiting for nearly two hours; the driver just went to sleep. They insisted on my staying."

"Who insisted?" Paula asked rather quickly.

"Old H.M. himself. Nobody else." Bill's brown eyes became ironic. "I have a funny reputation in Tangier. They think I've got common sense, which isn't true; and they think I can keep my mouth shut, which is true. The Colonel wanted suggestions." Now Bill spoke very slowly. "I didn't say much, but I think I have them."

"Bill, your heart's beating like a fire engine! What is it?"

"You'll see. When I first got to the house, the Colonel was telling them the stories of Iron Chest. Paula, how well do you know the history of Iron Chest?"

"Well—what's been in the press. A little I heard today."

Bill's eyes were shining, though they seemed to see nothing: Paula felt faint disquiet.

"As it happens," he went on, "I know it inside-out. Somebody here keeps a complete scrapbook from press-cutting agencies everywhere. You know her: Countess Scherbatsky."

"'Countess,'" repeated Paula in a certain tone, but did not comment further.

"Well," he reminded her tolerantly, "everybody in Tangier has a title. *Some* of them are quite genuine. The point is that her latest boy friend is in the detective bureau. Inspector Mendoza, to be exact. He tells Ilone everything they know here, straight from the stable; and Ilone tells me."

"Tells you what?"

" Let's take a look at Iron Chest. His last coup was in . . ."

" Lisbon ! " said Paula, fascinated and sitting up a little.

" Got it, my pet. In Lisbon, ten days ago : March 23. His previous one had been in Paris, a fortnight before that. Of course, the Lisbon police had been put on the alert. But Lisbon is an air centre, to say nothing of railways. Dozens of 'planes go in and out all the time. Ever since that coup in Paris, the Lisbon police had to keep an eye on the customs house.

" Their trouble was that nobody had the remotest idea what Iron Chest looked like. Their one high card was that he had to get his burglar's kit, including that electric drill, through the customs inspection. As for the actual iron chest, that was still worse.

" Remember, the Lisbon police had no particular reason to expect him, by air or train, except for that direct air route between Lisbon and Paris. He might be anywhere. Furthermore, how many people —including customs inspectors—could recognize a burglar's kit if they saw one ? Could you ? "

Paula shook her head. " I'm afraid not," she confessed.

" Everything seems to have been quiet, until the night of March 23. Then Iron Chest burgled a small private bank in the Avenida da Liberdade. Same drill, same kind of haul in dollars—and pesetas. Lisbon exploded.

" Now they were in their worst difficulty. Iron Chest couldn't hole up in Lisbon for long ; he never does. And customs authorities don't search the luggage of *outgoing* passengers, unless they have reason to suspect a particular person or persons, which they hadn't.

" The police brought in all the customs inspectors, and hammered them with questions about arrivals in the past two or three days. Meantime, all the various air lines had been co-operating by checking the list of arrivals who hadn't yet left.

" And this morning, my pet, it all happened at once."

Bill paused. Paula, clinging to him, wondered what he really meant behind this talk.

" In Lisbon, at half-past nine, an off-duty customs inspector rushed into the police. He said he'd cudgelled his wits and thought he remembered something about the evening 'plane from Paris on March 21, two days before the burglary. The customs inspector seemed to remember a man—couldn't remember face or any detail, of course—who carried a kit of tools, mostly smallish. The man explained this by saying he was a locksmith ; a very convincing explanation, too. The customs inspector had a notion, unsure, that the luggage tags had a name beginning, ' C-o-l ' something. There was another suggestion, but I won't bother you with it.

" By the time this customs inspector had finished, the police were so excited that they 'phoned the airport. They got quite a reply. It had just been discovered that a G. W. Collier had arrived in the Paris 'plane on the twenty-first. G. W. Collier, making a hasty last-minute booking because the 'plane wasn't full, had just done a bunk in the nine-thirty 'plane for Tangier, which left ten minutes before.

" That's about all. But the Portuguese police, sighing with relief, 'phoned Colonel Duroc and were glad to hand somebody else the baby. Iron Chest arrived on the very same 'plane this morning with H.M. and Miss Holmes."

" But the Colonel didn't say anything about that when I was there ! "

" He said a good deal about it when I was there," retorted Bill. " And more. Baggage, I wonder if you've ever realized what a canny old bird the Colonel really is ? "

" Nonsense ! " protested Paula, who remembered only gallantry and chuckles. " That's silly ! "

" Is it ? Think about old H.M.'s stupendous reception at the airport, which you thought was funny."

Paula gurgled. " You'd have thought so, too, if you'd been there. Those poor gibbering passengers all held up . . . "

Abruptly she sat up with a look of wonder on her face.

" Got it again, my pet," he smiled. " They stayed there while all their luggage was instantly whisked into the airport station, and the French customs had a real beano. Furthermore, they were kept in a queue for a passport examination which lasted over an hour.

" Meanwhile, the customs inspectors were doing a royal job. They didn't concentrate on G. W. Collier's luggage alone. Luggage tags can be transferred ; suitcases interchanged. So they pitched into everybody. They measured for false bottoms and compartments ; they flung out everything ; and Inspector Mendoza followed a dozen measures Duroc had written down for him."

Paula tugged at the collar of his shirt.

" Bill, wait ! " she urged. " What about this G. W. Collier ? "

" Well, what could Inspector Mendoza do ? " asked Bill. " He could look at the passport, ask where Collier was staying and search Collier himself. The man had nothing on him."

Bill drew a deep breath. " Paula, in all that luggage there was no kit of burglar's tools and no iron chest. Nothing that could be disguised as them ; nothing remotely resembling them. Absolutely nothing ! "

" But, Bill ! If Collier is Iron Chest, hasn't he given himself away horribly ? They know what he looks like."

" Oh, no, they don't ! Old H.M. and Colonel Duroc think, and I agree, that Collier isn't Iron Chest. Otherwise, would he have been fool enough to do what you just said ? No, my pet. Iron Chest must have only one accomplice : his diamond-cutter and polisher, who travels with him. And that's the ' collier.' "

" Yes. I can see . . . "

" But the real Iron Chest, who planned and managed everything." Bill told her, " was tucked safely away in that same 'plane. Nobody saw him, in the sense of observing. They let ' Collier ' go, of course ; if he weren't the man they wanted, he would be bait for the man they wanted. But Iron Chest slipped invisibly through the barrier and into Tangier."

Paula shivered. " Bill," she said, " I'm frightened. It's creepy. It's . . . It's unnatural ! "

" It's unnatural, right enough," he agreed. Then his usually low voice rang out. " But what an opportunity ! "

" Opportunity ? "

" Iron Chest is tricky, he's spectacular ; he's got a satirical sense of humour," Bill said. " Have you seen those photographs of the iron chest ? The carving round the edges is of monkeys putting out their tongues at you. And Iron Chest is matched against H.M., who's even trickier and more spectacular. All the same . . ." Suddenly his tone altered. " Paula ! Can you guess the total amount of the rewards from various cities for the capture of Iron Chest ? It's well over seven thousand pounds." He spoke blankly. " Paula, suppose *I* caught him ? "

Now Paula was really frightened.

" Bill," she said in her most yearning voice, " sit down and put your arms round me. Don't you want to ? "

" Of course."

He sat down and held her tightly. Then Paula had an inspiration, based on her knowledge of him, which she felt with a sting in her heart must be true.

" I know now ! " she whispered. " Darling, I know why you're troubled about money ; and it's all my fault." Paula loved to take the blame on herself. " We've been too extravagant, that's all. We've been living and having our meals at the most expensive hotel in Tangier, which you can't afford. But I remember . . . Yes ! An advertisement in the *Tangier Gazette* today . . ."

She did not tell him fully of her inspiration, hugging the secret.

" If we could get a little flat, and I did the housekeeping and cooking, it would change everything . . ."

Bill, waking up from his daze, blinked at her.

" What flat ? " he asked. " Who's talking about a flat ? "

" Never mind, dear." Then she chided him. " Anyway, why do you want to win all that money ? "

" It's not the money, so much." He shook his head and brooded. " Though that would get us free from this consular grind, and we could retire somewhere. Perhaps—England."

They looked at each other. For an instant it became achingly clear that she did not understand his motives, and he did not understand hers. A gulf opened between them, terrifying because they had been so intimate. It might have grown worse if Bill had not kissed her, so that healing warmth destroyed mere words.

" Paula, I'm a blasted fool ! " he said at length. " Forget what I said, won't you ? I didn't mean it ! "

OVER Tangier, even in what seems the blackest night, there hangs always a faint greyness as of hidden lamps. When the car swung into the Grand Socco, it was only a quarter to midnight.

Paula did not notice that her husband was driving so slowly

that the Standard's engine almost stalled. She was peering out and up through one open window on the left.

"Bill!" She was delighted. "Look here!"

On the roof ledge over a draper's shop, at the left-hand side of the rue du Statut, squatted cross-legged a very fat Italian with a guitar. His head was flung back, so that you could see the huge cavern of his mouth and even his bald head.

"*Che be-la co-sa,*" warbled the rich tenor, "*'na iur-na-ta'e sooo-le?*"

"Isn't it rather lovely?" asked Paula, leaning back cosily.

Then it happened. Across her words ripped the violent, continuous *clatter-clang* of a burglar alarm.

It drove into the ears like a drill into a safe. Across the street, the guitar fell and smashed unheard on the pavement. A mutter of voices swept up from the Grand Socco.

There were now comparatively few doors between them and the intersection of the rue du Sud. The instant that burglar alarm had clattered out, Bill Bentley jammed on the handbrake and stopped the car.

Paula, peering past him, could see the front of a familiar shop. It was a jeweller's. It had a broad display window on either side of the front door; but windows and door were now protected by a folding steel grille which not even a ghost would dare to touch in an open street. Over the shop, in large separated gilt letters, ran the sign, "Bernstein et Cie."

On the left-hand side of the building ran a narrow alley, and there was a side door to the premises of the jeweller. Bill Bentley flung open the car door and jumped out on the pavement.

"*Bill! No! Bill!*"

"I knew it!" he shouted. "A stuffed dummy could have guessed it!"

And, taking only one glance at the locked steel grille across the front, he raced down the dark alley towards the side door. The burglar alarm still clanged and clattered to the night.

FRANTICALLY Paula pushed herself across the seat, under the driving wheel, and leaped out to the pavement. She was facing straight down the dark alley, and heard Bill's footsteps on stone.

Over the side door of Bernstein et Cie. there flashed on a large but dull-burning electric bulb under a round and flat tin shade. Bill, in the darkness, had run past the door by eight or ten feet; Paula saw him whip round as the light appeared.

Then came the nightmare.

The side door, an ordinary-sized door, was flung open. Out stumbled a man with a felt hat pulled down on his head. Clutched heavily under his left arm but partly across his body was a familiar object from which the light struck a dull gleam—especially on the frieze of monkeys' heads. The burglar alarm stopped, and silence smote like a blow in the face.

The man, adjusting his burden, ran for the mouth of the alley. Out of the side door plunged Colonel Duroc and H.M., one stoutish and one very stout man getting in each other's way.

But Bill, the instant that door opened, had taken off like a sprinter. His head was crouched low. Paula could see the expression on his face, lips drawn back over the teeth ; he would get Iron Chest or get a bullet. Miraculously Bill dodged past H.M. and the Colonel, overtook his quarry—and dived at him with a Rugby tackle from behind.

Only Iron Chest's sneering luck saved him then. Bill's right hand hooked round the runner's right knee, and strove to send his arm round to the elbow. But he made exactly the same mistake as had the policeman in Brussels. Bill's left hand darted up to seize that accursed, maddening chest, and his fingers slipped on a too-smooth surface.

Off-balance and dragged face forward, Bill would still have kept his grip on the right knee if the burglar's trousers had held. Six inches of some thin material ripped off under Bill's hand. The solid phantom kicked viciously backwards into his adversary's left shoulder ; Bill, still groping, fell heavily on his side and rolled over on his back.

Even then they might have nabbed him, if H.M. and Duroc had been quick enough. Iron Chest was staggering and almost down. Yet he half turned behind. Paula caught the gleam on a snub-nosed but heavy revolver, and he fired almost point-blank at Bill's body.

And now the hobgoblin, little more than a black silhouette, raced for the mouth of the alley and came face to face with Paula.

They were about four feet apart. There was just enough light, perhaps, for her to have seen his face. But her vision was concentrated all on those shiny monkeys ; her mind flew past to Bill. Blank face's gun hand snaked up over the chest and he fired two shots at Paula's head, as he whipped up the alley.

Suddenly police whistles seemed to be shrilling from everywhere.

At the same time Colonel Duroc, in full uniform and cap, plunged out with a red and frantic face and stared round. Momentarily he glanced back to shout to someone invisible in the alley.

" Inspector Mendoza, where is the Commandant ? "

" My Colonel, I don't know ! He has not been here at all."

" Our men were to have been placed so that not even a snake could have left ! Where are they ? "

" My Colonel, the Commandant was to have given the orders. Myself, I am lying on top of the wall at the back of the alley. I dare not give the orders until . . ."

" My God ! " whispered the Colonel, and lifted both arms to the sky. He paused. His gruff voice thundered out like a fog horn, yet with every word clear.

" Listen, all agents of police. Listen, police. Our man is departed into the rue Waller ! Trap him there ! After him, all of you ! All ! "

Now the street was alive and drumming to the sound of running feet. There were ghostly glimpses of white helmets, white belts, white truncheons in hand. Among them flashed a number of sprinters who could easily overtake the fugitive.

Up from the Grand Socco poured Arabs in *jelabs*, Arabs in robes, Arabs in ordinary clothes but wearing the red tarbush.

"Ten thousand pesetas," yelled Duroc, first in French and then in Arabic, "to the man who has him!"

The turmoil went mad.

During all this, Bill Bentley had run across the street and seized Paula. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, and you?"

"Yes, not a scratch."

This was not quite true. There was a blackish smear on the left shoulder of Bill's shirt, covering a long purpling bruise underneath. His right sleeve was torn, with blackish stone scratchings oozing blood. A trouser knee was torn, and both wrists scratched on their underside.

Out of the alley lumbered Sir Henry Merrivale, his hat gone and his bald head gleaming.

"You all right, my dolly?"

"Of course I am!" smiled Paula.

"And you, son," said H.M. Adjusting his spectacles, he peered at Bill. The latter, though his look could not conceal bitter disappointment, showed himself unhurt.

"Now that's very interestin'," growled H.M. "Come with me, both of you!"

The tumult now boiled at its highest down in the rue Waller. Policemen, heaven knows why, persisted in blowing their whistles. There was a high neighing and heavy stamping of frightened horses in a nearby stable. But H.M. led Paula and Bill into the alley.

"Son," he said to Bill, "do you mind getting your clothes messed up again? Well, fall down and show me exactly where you were when Iron Chest took a shot at you."

Bill studied the ground, but much study was not necessary under H.M.'s moving light. The stone-paved alley was thick with dirt as well as grit, and they could see the marks where Bill had been thrown and dragged. There lay a flimsy piece of light-brown material torn from the unknown's trouser leg.

Nodding approval, Bill first lay down on his right side, where Paula had seen him fall, and then rolled over on his back with his left shoulder touching the wall.

"Now!" grunted H.M.

Sending the beam of the torch along Bill's length, he next lifted it and played it along the wall as far as the bullet hole.

"No, don't get up. Look!" admonished H.M. "Now, I saw that gun. It's the American revolver they call a Colt's Banker's Special, .38, very short barrel, but heavy fire power and deadly at short range. This humorous feller shot at you . . . well, not exactly at point-blank range, but very close. And yet he missed you by two feet."

Bill scrambled up from the ground.

"And you, my dolly," said H.M., turning to Paula, "are you certain you don't feel any powder specklings on your forehead? No, not powder burns. But this was only four feet away from you. Usually there are stings from unburnt powder grains after a near miss."

"There aren't any," she answered, her knees trembling.

Bill immediately put his arm round her.

" It's my own fault," he said soberly. " If I'd hit him with a clean tackle for both knees, he'd have gone over flat. But, no. Oh, no. I had to make a grab for that chest. Even then I might have done it. But the damned iron was polished ; kind of film on it, like polished steel ; my fingers slipped on it, and down I went. But if I'd had any sense ! The rewa—" again Bill stopped.

" No, son," said H.M., " it wasn't your fault. It was pure cussedness. Just as it's happened every other time." He turned back, and his diffidence was explained by his look of secret guilt. " Burn it, what about me ? I was standin' here as paralysed as a straw ghoul (and so was the Colonel) with my eyes bulging out because I thought you'd got him."

" *If* I'd got him ! Lord, *if* I'd got him ! "

" Son," said H.M. in a heavy, serious voice, " I want you to think. And think hard, just the same as you did at Colonel Duroc's place this afternoon."

" Well, sir ? "

Bill's eyes were shining again, and Paula's heart sank as she saw the detective fever burn once more.

" In twelve spectacular burglaries, thirteen if we include tonight, Iron Chest has been seen making his getaway no less than nine times. In every instance he's fired shots, sometimes several shots, at people who weren't quite close enough to nab him."

" Yes ? " prompted Bill.

" And yet, with all that gun play, what's the result ? With the exception of a poor-devil policeman in Brussels, who recovered, and a powerful woman in Madrid who wanted the reward, and got a hip wound, Iron Chest hasn't hit a single person for all his shootin'. How do you explain that ? Hey ? "

Bill, pondering, shifted from one foot to the other. He rubbed the side of his jaw with a grimy hand.

" Putting aside the idea that he's simply a rotten bad shot," he observed, " you could have it another way. As, for instance, when he shot at me. He took a snap shot at me : off-balance, half-turning, and weighted with that heavy chest. More or less the same with Paula ; he was still half-staggering. It all comes down to this : *why* does he insist on carrying that damned chest ? Is it a kind of mascot he thinks will bring luck ? "

" 'Tisn't as easy as that, son." H.M. glanced back at the lighted side door, inside which someone seemed to lurk. " Anyway, regarding the jiggery-pokery the police played here tonight . . ."

Satiric lines appeared round Bill's mouth.

" If you'll pardon me saying it, sir," he said, " it was fairly obvious what you and the police would do. Also, what Iron Chest would do."

H.M.'s face turned slightly purple. " What d'ye mean, obvious ? "

" It was tolerably certain Iron Chest would have a go at Bernstein and Company," said Bill. " First, he'd burgled their branch at Brussels, and he can't have a very high opinion of their locks. Second, for weeks it's been in the newspapers that a West African potentate,

the Sultan of Somewhere, I forget, was bringing one hundred uncut diamonds to Tangier, and handing them over to Bernstein and Company to be cut and polished as a necklace for his third and final wife."

"Uh-huh," agreed H.M. in a strangled voice. "Anything else?"

"Iron Chest, I decided, would reason thus: 'They'll think I mean to lie low and reconnoitre for a night or two, as I usually do; therefore I'll hit 'em tonight.' You, on the other hand, would reason: 'He may not strike tonight; but in case it's a double bluff, we'd better have that jeweller's covered just the same.' Proof, sir? I was here when the fireworks began."

"Y'know, son," H.M. observed thoughtfully, "I told the Colonel this evening you had a lot of grey matter floatin' about unperceived. I say, son." He coughed. "I'm not interested in rewards. If you'd like to take a hand in this . . . hey?"

Paula glanced quickly at Bill. Bill, in a somewhat over-heroic attitude, did not even look at her.

"I'm afraid I can't, sir. You see, there's a lot of extra work at the consulate I've got to handle. Decisions, you know . . ."

"Sure," said H.M., "you mean your wife has got a smackin' influence over you. Some wives are tyrants. Awful tyrants."

"I'm not a tyrant!" said Paula, indignant and rather shocked. "He's p-perfectly free to do anything he likes, and he knows it."

Now *she* was becoming noble. And yet, though she was now very calm, horror seemed to crawl inside her skin.

"Sir Henry," she asked hesitantly, "what *happened* here tonight? Why were you and the Colonel inside the jeweller's with Iron Chest? Where was Juan Alvarez? And those hundred diamonds—how many did Iron Chest steal?"

"Not one ruddy diamond," H.M. said. "Not one jewel. Not one peseta or anything else."

"Wow!" said Bill, and gleefully slapped a torn knee and winced.

"Y'see," H.M. explained, "early in the evening Duroc 'phoned 'young' M. Bernstein, who's about fifty and the last of an old family who've had a jeweller's in Paris since the eighteenth century. He drove down here with us, gave the Colonel all his keys, and sent away the night watchman."

H.M. wheeled round towards the side door.

"Monsieur l'Inspecteur Mendoza!" he called.

Out under the overhead lamp stepped briskly a tall, bony, rather handsome man with a narrow line of black moustache. His felt hat showed heavy dark hair with grey at the temples; he was well dressed in civilian clothes, and smoked a cigarette rather nervously.

"*Oui, Seer Henri?*"

"Be good enough," H.M. intoned like a soothsayer, "to telephone to M. Bernstein and tell him that he need no longer be in the apples."

"Pardon me, Sir Henry?"

"Ah, bah! It is an expression of slang. Have the kindness to inform M. Bernstein that the robbery has failed and not a jewel is missing."

"Very good, Sir Henry," said Mendoza, and disappeared.

" But what *happened?* " Paula insisted again.

" Can't you guess, my dolly? For nearly three mortal hours, Duroc and I hid in Bernstein's private office. Look! " H.M. pointed. " That side door leads to it. It's partitioned off from the front of the shop. The safe is against the wall opposite the side door; and, on the left, there's a pretty big cupboard. That's where Duroc and I hid.

" Y'see, the place was all dark. The cupboard door," H.M. continued, " was open only about half an inch. I got all the view there was, because Duroc couldn't move me. His language was shockin' . . ."

Paula giggled. H.M., glaring at her over his spectacles, climbed down from his virtuous pedestal.

" All right! " he growled. " Iron Chest got there about a quarter to midnight. He found that opening the side door was as easy as shellin' peas. What he didn't know, and we did, was the little trick Bernstein had kept there for years."

" Trick? " interposed Bill. " What trick? "

" Y'see, the main burglar alarm ain't attached to the door or windows." The old reprobate was faintly amused. " It works from a hidden button, set flush with the floor, in front of the safe and just under the lock. Even in daylight it's hard to spot. Iron Chest prowled in with a torch. He put down the chest, which had the burglin' tools—you'd be surprised how small and light the kit was—packed inside in velvet. He didn't open 'em; just looked at 'em and put 'em back. He prowled over to the safe with his torch, and then . . . whang!

" Burn me, I never knew a burglar alarm could possibly be so loud! Then the Colonel struggled and got both of us stuck in the door. Iron Chest got his burden together, put the torch in his pocket and pulled out a short-nosed Colt's Banker's Special, and hared out. You know the rest."

Shaking his head in a dissatisfied kind of way, H.M. walked to the mouth of the alley and then out into the middle of the rue du Statut. Paula and Bill followed. H.M., the corners of his mouth turned down, was surveying the folding steel framework across the front of Bernstein et Cie. His gaze moved to the shop next door, down towards the Grand Socco: a shop window across which ran the enamelled letters, " Luisa Bonomi," and under them, in Spanish and French, " Masks and Costumes."

" Sir Henry," said Paula, " do you think they'll catch him? "

" No, my dolly," replied H.M., pulling at his underlip. " Y'see, they don't know what they're looking for."

Paula and Bill exchanged puzzled glances.

" And as a specific instance of what I mean, I'll show you," he declared. " We've never once had even a tolerable description of Iron Chest, have we? Right! Now both of you saw him tonight, and at close range. Describe him! "

There was a silence.

" Do you know," Bill suddenly remarked, " that for the life of

me I can't remember. When he took a shot at me I was lying on my back, eyes in the wrong direction, and all I saw was a flash. No; I can't describe him."

"Well, I can't," Paula said defensively. "He was a—a dark silhouette. Anyway, I was looking at that dreadful iron chest with the monkeys. I rather think he had a hat on."

At that moment Colonel Duroc arrived.

"Well!" he said in English, and with an effort. "We have lost our man again. Again he performs a vanish trick." Colonel Duroc paused for breath. "And who is responsible for this?"

"Now don't you look at me!" blared H.M. He appealed to the others with power of sympathy. "I get myself almost murdered again, bein' cloth-witted enough to drive down in the Colonel's car. Haa, that reminds me. You promised I could have what I wanted. I know just how to travel in this town. Do I get what I want?"

The Colonel waved his hand grandly.

"It shall arrive," he announced, "by special 'plane from Lisbon tomorrow morning." He raised his voice. "Mendoza!

"Inspector Mendoza," he purred in a soft voice. "You were second in command to Commandant Alvarez of the men outside the jeweller's. Myself, I was inside that office accursed since nine o'clock. Our men were huddled into doorways, crouched everywhere in the wrong places, without orders. Since the Commandant has not seen fit to appear, why did you not give orders yourself?"

"I have told you, my Colonel, I did not dare! Pardon me; the Commandant is a martinet . . . I believe, my Colonel, that the Commandant had arranged to meet a young lady, a Miss Maureen 'Olmes, at the restaurant Caravel to dine at seven-thirty."

"The restaurant Caravel? But . . . no matter! A man may dine at seven-thirty, and yet report for duty at nine hours!"

"True, my Colonel. However, according to the waiters and the boss, the Commandant arrives too early. At half-past seven he is still inscrutable. When the lady does not arrive at eight hours, his fingers drum the table and his boots strike the floor. At eight-thirty, when still she is not arrived, the Commandant calls for glasses of brandy. And, according to the waiters . . . By blue, how this man can drink! Now, if I may digress . . ."

"Continue, continue!"

"It seems that the young lady, in some fashion, thought the Commandant told her to meet him at the restaurant Ciro."

"The restaurant Ciro!" muttered the Colonel, striking his hands together. "Yes, this is true. I have heard her say it myself."

"Then the rest is not much. When the Commandant does not appear at eight-thirty, this young lady throws plates on the floor and bursts into tears. Henri and all his staff try to console her. Yet she leaps into a taxi and returns to your own home, my Colonel, on the Old Mountain."

"And the Commandant?"

"Well, then, they have found him in his own flat. He is unconscious and black-drunk."

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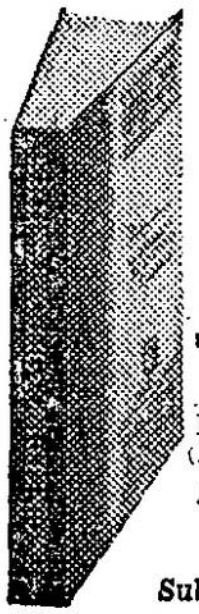

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NEXT morning just after seven-thirty, a full half-hour before there was any likelihood of Bill waking up, Paula sat in a taxi, yesterday's *Tangier Gazette* clenched under her arm. She had determined to solve all difficulties—worries about money, or so she imagined—by getting a small but modern flat and doing the housekeeping herself; and the *Gazette* advertisement seemed to offer just what she wanted.

"I'll get it," she told herself, "I *must* get it."

Though Paula did not read the newspaper, many phrases of the advertisement were printed in her mind. True, it contained only one large bed-sitting room, but by day the bed could neatly be disguised as a couch. It had a kitchenette—and this could instantly be hidden behind sliding doors. The bathroom contained every modern comfort. "Excellent for transients," no! . . . "Inspection invited," good! Though it added no telephone number, it gave a price absurdly low.

Best of all was the address: number 40-bis Marshan.

"Next door to Dr. MacPhail," whispered Paula to herself. It couldn't be better.

Marshan was a vast flat open space. At one corner stood Dr. MacPhail's nursing home, as up-to-date as any in London.

Paula, as the heavy taxi whipped up the rue du Statut, past the broad silent Place de la France, and again uphill by way of the rue du Fez, was still far away in thought. She grinned as her mind drifted back to very late last night, to the final violent argument between Sir Henry Merrivale and Colonel Duroc before all left for home.

"Come, we must not stand here in the open street," Duroc had spluttered. Carefully he gathered up the torn piece of trouser material, to derisive remarks from H.M. "Now, I tell you. We must all have a last drink, a cup of the stirrup. You agree?"

And so he had led H.M., Bill, and Paula to the Parade Bar.

Round the walls runs a red-padded bench, with tables, at which you may have excellent food as well as drink. H.M. and the Colonel had taken a far corner table, where they sat down side by side. Bill was beside the Colonel, Paula beside H.M., like acolytes.

"*Alors*," said the Colonel, tapping his fingers on the table, "you believe that our criminal will again try to crack the safe of M. Bernstein?"

"Uh-huh. And I'll bet you," leered H.M., "we'll catch him this time if *I* give the orders."

Surprisingly, both of them spoke in soft voices. They emphasized a point only by facial contortions, though for the most part the Colonel had regained all his old suavity.

"Come!" he said. "Then I am stumbling in my strategy?"

"No, no! You're all right. But this is a very rummy case, Colonel. You oughtn't to use the whole blinkin' police force. What you want are fewer men at better points."

"I've got to have a pretty big map," he continued. "Then there's somebody for you to supply. This man you've got to supply can't be swarthy complexioned, like your police and detectives. Don't

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ask me why! . . . He's got to have a good deal of courage. And he must be an A-1 first-class shot with a revolver or an automatic."

It was now the Colonel's turn to behave like a magician.

"Behold," he beamed, moving his wrist to the right, "your candidate himself. Mr. William Bentley. He is the best pistol shot in Tangier."

Paula sat up straight. Even she had never known this, because Bill simply had never troubled to mention it.

Bill, now somewhat pink, moved his shoulders and attempted to see Paula without looking up. He failed.

"I'm not too bad with a revolver," he muttered. "But no automatics, thanks. Sometimes they jam and they do a funny jump."

"No!" Paula had blurted out instinctively. "No, no, no!"

Suddenly her rememembrances of the dim-lit Parade Bar, with its voices and its clink of glasses amid dull red and black, were whisked away and dissolved like a dream.

"No, no, no!" Paula said aloud, and roused herself out of reverie.

She was sitting, cold and huddled, in the back of a swift-humming taxi which carried her up through the streets towards her destination at number 40-bis Marshan.

Bill was in danger. She *must* get that flat!

The block of flats was separated from the nursing home only by a flower-bordered path which led straight back to Dr. MacPhail's house at the rear. It was of yellow stucco with a roof of green curved tiles. Across the front, between the upper and lower floor, ran a narrow balcony with a railing of lacy wrought iron, with arches of laced iron both above and below. Lines of windows had each a pair of wooden shutters painted green and fast shut. Except . . .

As Paula went up the stone-paved walk, some flash of movement crossed the corner of her vision. She glanced up at the line of windows upstairs. A small window in the upper left-hand had its closed shutters painted a bright crimson, solitary crimson against the other green shutters.

Just as she reached the entrance, the cab which had been following her slid quietly to a stop.

A few moments later Paula stood motionless in front of the flat door. To rouse up the tenant at this ungodly hour . . .

Yet she *must* do this! Drawing a deep breath, clutching the newspaper under her arm, Paula pressed hard at the electric door-bell.

Nothing happened; at least, Paula could detect no sound of ringing or buzzing inside that small flat. Dead silence in the dingy corridor, under the depressing lights. Undoubtedly the bell was out of order. Paula, daunted, knocked at the door, but with so light a knock that perhaps it went unheard. Automatically her hand fell on the nickelled iron knob, and a soft twist showed that the door was open. Either by instinct or fever-pitch curiosity, Paula swung open the noiselessly moving door until she could see most of the room.

Then again came the nightmare.

It held her body rigid, her mind frozen in a soundless scream.

She was looking into the one large, square room described in the

advertisement. Its walls, of cream-coloured plaster, were even more dingy than the corridors outside. In the wall well towards her left, folding doors were closed on what must be the kitchenette. In the same wall, towards the front, an open door showed a narrow bathroom with closed shutters painted crimson even on the inside.

Facing her from some distance, in the wall opposite, was a small fireplace with a small grate in which a bright coal fire burned against the cold. In the right-hand wall, as Paula saw when she turned her head, were two large windows with crimson shutters held locked by a wooden bar.

At a heavy mahogany table in the middle of the room, his back turned to the door, sat a man with a jeweller's lens in his eye. Because of a rather high easy chair, Paula could see only that he had a very short thick neck, and a head of abundant hair—at once darkish and yet fiery red—parted and plastered down with hair cream.

At his left, on the crimson table cover, stood the iron chest itself, the famous chest gleaming under the half-domed, inverted roof lamp. In front of the man, set out in rows, were more uncut diamonds than Paula's numbed brain could count.

STILL silence . . .

A draught of wind, beginning some distance away in the rather unsavoury corridors, crept along and stirred at the door. Paula could feel it on her neck, on the backs of her calves. The draught strengthened. On the table, to the right of the red-haired man, lay a few light sheets of writing paper. One of these sheets gently fluttered into the air, hovered, and sailed away.

The man in the chair knew now. Quietly he put down the lens. Then, fast and sudden, he jumped up and whirled round to face Paula.

Of that man, beyond the fiery red hair, Paula noticed only that it seemed—she could not analyse it, save that it was a whitish ordinary-looking face—one of the most unpleasant she had ever seen.

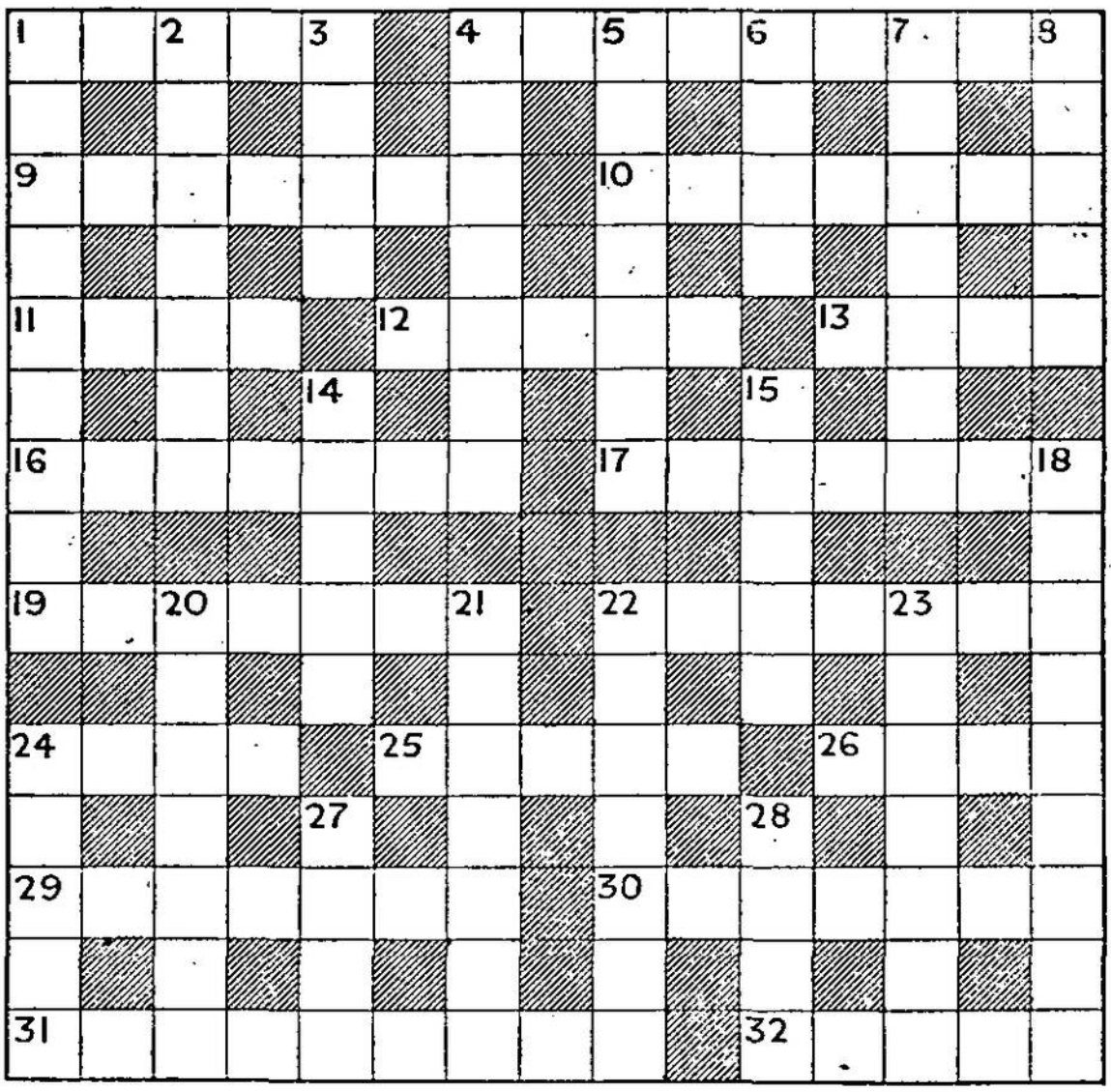
"*Who in hell*—" he snarled in English, with a thin raspy tenor from a heavy body.

And, both arms extended with fingers crooked, he plunged forward towards her.

★ ***And so, face to face with this sinister figure—can it be Iron Chest in person?—we leave the luckless Mrs. Bentley. The next part of this great mystery story will appear in the next issue of ARGOSY, on sale January 10th. Why not make sure of your copy by placing an order with your newsagent?***

ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 92



CLUES

Across

1 This fish appears at table only as a sweet (5).

4 I arm Satan? Most unlikely since I'm good (9).

9 The beginning of trouble for Electra (7).

10 Add the girl up, and be brief! (7).

11 Paid to provide nourishment (4).

12 Where guns are made in the Hebrides? (5).

13 The place of a substitute (4).

16 To lift the yoke in South Africa (7).

17 A lift in the right direction (5, 2).

19 News of the currents, perhaps (7).

22 Its catch is the result of a drag (7).

24 A bird to peddle? (4).

25 This animal was at the head of the burn during the battle (5).

26 An alternative German river (4).

29 The last word on its subject (7).

30 Difficult to undertake an icy trek in this condition! (7).

31 Sweetmeat for a balletomane (9).

32 A headless little animal in the studio.! (5).

Down

1 He is a blighter in the garden (4, 5).

2 Remove the cake from a young pretender! (7).

3 It's the key to the university (4).

4 Take the number you should be thinking of and square it (7).

5 Sounds as if the young lady is required to raise her voice—but it's lost (7).

6 The slope that leads to a racket? (4).

7 So there's a monopoly in this drink. How ripping! (7).

8 Don't annoy Augustus; he's full of liqueur! (5).

14 Exhausted. Because the money's gone? (5).

15 He had a golden touch (5).

18 The picturing of a *beam of light in the* doorway? (9).

20 Descending a street off Whitehall? (7).

21 It accompanies a "shining morning face" to school (7).

22 A proof that mineral deposits are in them (7).

23 They provide one means of getting to the top (7).

24 "His flaming robes stream'd out beyond his ——" (Keats) (5).

27 I was untruthful; but having changed places with A I've turned to a refuge (4).

28 Came to perfection (4).

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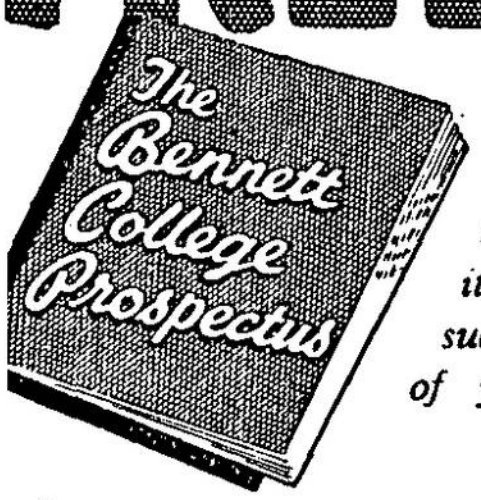

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Lacey